

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE			Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. AGENCY USE ONLY (Leave blank)	2. REPORT DATE 16.Nov.00	3. REPORT TYPE AND DATES COVERED THESIS		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE NAPOLEON, DE GAULLE AND THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR		5. FUNDING NUMBERS		
6. AUTHOR(S) 2D LT LEONARD DOUGLAS W				
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER CY00448		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) THE DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE AFIT/CIA, BLDG 125 2950 P STREET WPAFB OH 45433		10. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER		
11. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES				
12a. DISTRIBUTION AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Unlimited distribution In Accordance With AFI 35-205/AFIT Sup 1		12b. DISTRIBUTION CODE		
13. ABSTRACT (Maximum 200 words)		DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A Approved for Public Release Distribution Unlimited		
14. SUBJECT TERMS		15. NUMBER OF PAGES 171		
		16. PRICE CODE		
17. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF REPORT	18. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE	19. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF ABSTRACT	20. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	

DTIC QUALITY INSPECTED 4

20001130 063

THE FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

NAPOLEON, DE GAULLE AND THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR

By

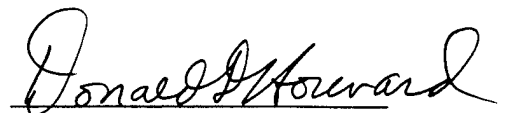
DOUGLAS W. LEONARD

A thesis submitted to the
Department of History
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

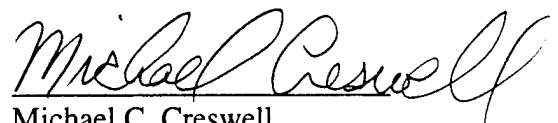
Degree Awarded:
Summer Semester, 2000

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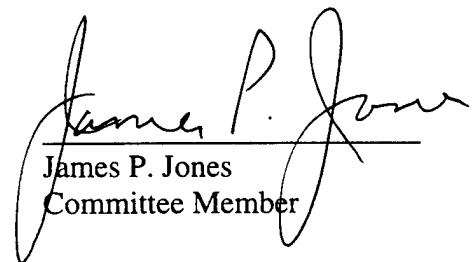
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed to the completion of this thesis. I owe a debt of gratitude to the staff of Strozier Library's Special Collections and Sub-Basement. They took an interest in my work and provided invaluable assistance in the location and use of materials. Their knowledge of the materials available was infinitely helpful.

Of course, I cannot forget the debt of gratitude I owe to several graduate students in the Institute on Napoleon and the French Revolution. Paul Reese, Amy Johnston, Kevin McCranie and Karen Darden provided immense support as I entered the community. In addition to their willingness to accept me as a fellow academic, they provided wonderful scholastic advice and assistance. Their assistance was invaluable, and without their help this project would have been much more difficult.

I would like to give further thanks to the faculty that has helped me over the past year. My major professor, Dr. Donald Horward, provided me with the opportunity to study under one of the best minds in Napoleonic history. His wisdom, experience, expertise and amazing love of history inspired me to greater heights than I ever thought I could reach. I will carry my experience as one of his family of graduate students for the rest of my life. I am also fortunate to have two other distinguished members of the faculty on my committee. Dr. James Jones provided me with wonderful advice and a great example of scholarship, and I thank him for his time and guidance. Dr. Michael

Creswell gave me a fresh outlook on history, and his willingness to donate his time and advice to my thesis helped beyond words.

I would also like to thank my parents, Gerald and Linda. Each provided an enormous amount of academic guidance over the course of my educational career. Without their energy, confidence and support I could never have finished this project. Finally, I am especially thankful to my dearest friend, Kathryn, whose love and support throughout the writing of this thesis allowed me to complete the most challenging intellectual endeavor of my career.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the continued importance of Napoleon Bonaparte as a military theorist. His principles of war, as recorded by staff officers, in his writings, and by his actions, stand as the basis of modern military theory. The true impact of Napoleon on the principles of warfare and military theory is best seen through a comparison of the Emperor and General Charles De Gaulle. De Gaulle wrote a series of works from roughly the 1920s to the 1940s. In these writings he described his conception of warfare. His theories, however, have not been incorporated into any of the studies describing the progression of the military art. This omission has been a great oversight, since De Gaulle stood as a great interpreter of Napoleon. Not only did he incorporate many of the Emperor's theories into his writing, he also looked on Napoleon as the greatest embodiment of a military leader. De Gaulle wanted another leader to take the place of Napoleon, to return France to its place of prominence.

On the other hand, this work should not be interpreted as a biography of either Napoleon or De Gaulle. It is not a comparison of their life or work; indeed, De Gaulle had very little opportunity to put his work into action. It is for this reason that the historical scholar must rely almost entirely on De Gaulle's own writings in an effort to gain an understanding of his attitudes toward the principles of war. In fact, it is in this area exclusively that this study has been attempted. This thesis is intended to delineate

the progression from the principles of war as described by Napoleon to De Gaulle's use of the same principles over one hundred years later. It is through this comparison that the continued importance of Napoleon is most easily seen.

De Gaulle was almost certainly the most prestigious French theorist since Napoleon. Although his ideas were not adopted until it was too late, he still earned a place of prominence unknown since the First Empire. It is for this reason that he has been included in the comparison. Napoleon's importance is best shown by demonstrating the continued existence of his principles of war in the writings of one of his most famous followers.

The discussion of Napoleonic principles of war must necessarily begin with the source of his ideas. Napoleon was not an innovator; rather, he adopted the ideas of the theorists before him and perfected them in battle. Consequently, the first chapter of this work is devoted to the primary theorists before Napoleon. The following chapters are dedicated to each of the nine principles of war, including the views of both Napoleon and De Gaulle on each. The principles of war as originally envisioned by Napoleon include nine primary ideas. They are, in order of presentation: objective, unity of command, offensive, mass, maneuver, economy of force, security, surprise and simplicity.

Although this list seems long, it is certainly the smallest enumeration of principles by any military theorist. These principles have come to form the basis of modern military thought. It is through this continuation that Napoleon's importance is most clearly seen.

INTRODUCTION

Military theory is a subject often studied, but rarely understood. Many thinkers have attempted to create a theory that incorporated every aspect of warfare. In other words, each theorist tried to write a manual on the proper execution of a war. However, these attempts have been unsuccessful. War is an art form, not a science. It cannot be prescribed and dictated. Military theory must necessarily be vague. A general can lay out guidelines for the proper prosecution of an attack against an enemy; he cannot give the key to his successor, or often himself. Instead, the conduct of war depends on the quality of the commander. Nearly all military theories admit one key point: the commander represents the single most important aspect.

Napoleon certainly believed in the importance of the commander. Indeed, he stands among the greatest military leaders of all time. He did not try to prescribe military theory; instead, he laid out basic principles from which a brilliant commander could gain victory. Moreover, Napoleon did not truly create the ideas that he espoused. He was simply a great integrator; he took the ideas of the eighteenth-century theorists and made them into a large, coherent whole. A score of men contributed to writing on military art in the eighteenth century. Napoleon simply took the best of these ideas, extrapolating on them into his method of war. At the same time, Napoleon stood as a great contributor to the future of military theory. His principles of war, gained from

experience and inheritance, continue to form the basis of modern military theory.

Charles De Gaulle was a great beneficiary of this heritage. He used the Napoleonic principles in his own writing, applying the same ideas to warfare in the twentieth century.

A study of the principles of war delineated by Napoleon must begin before his birth. A history of Napoleon's principles must include the contributions of the theorists such as Frederick the Great, Maurice de Saxe and many others. Thus, the first chapter in this work must be devoted to the theoretical antecedents of the Emperor. Only through a comprehensive study can the true nature and importance of Napoleon's theory be shown.

This examination of Napoleon and De Gaulle is intended to clearly enumerate the nine modern principles of war, as first espoused by Napoleon in his writings and actions on the battlefield. De Gaulle took these ideas and made them his own, clearly demonstrating the continued importance of Napoleonic theory to military thought. The principles have been presented in accordance with the author's opinion on their relative importance. Thus, objective is discussed first, as no military operation could proceed without a clear objective. Each man's opinions on the unity of command follow the discussion of objective. The emphasis on the offensive must logically follow, as the entire system of war called for by each man required forward movement.

Following an analysis of offensive warfare, this theoretical study must move on to the idea of mass or concentration. Each man clearly saw the importance of a massed attack at a vulnerable point in the enemy position. However, this use of mass did not preclude the necessity for maneuver because the army still had to move in order to place itself in a favorable position. Moreover, the military force had to be used judiciously with a secondary effort utilized in an economy of force to ensure mass in the primary

sector. During the course of these operations, the army had to maintain proper security. The enemy had to be screened from army movements, and both deception and intelligence gathering played important roles in this operation. Surprise was absolutely critical to secure the initiative. Indeed, this principle tied almost directly into security. Finally, the plans and execution of orders had to remain simple. An overly complex operation was bound for failure.

These principles were created by Napoleon largely in his writing to his subordinates about military operations. He wanted them to understand the actions necessary to gain victory. The Emperor, of course, was the overriding genius guiding the operations, adding that last spark to the mix. This study is intended to show the views of both men on these nine principles of war. The lineage between the two different eras is clear. Napoleon accumulated the disparate ideas of his predecessors into a series of principles, passing these on to De Gaulle through his writings and excellent example. Neither Napoleon nor De Gaulle was an innovator; both took the example of those before them and applied it, in Napoleon's case with brilliance. Although the terminology and focus of the two theorists was not always identical, the ideas remained the same.

Military theory as an historical topic rose to a place of prominence in the nineteenth century, following Napoleon's domination of the continent. Carl von Clausewitz, Baron Antoine-Henri Jomini and others tried to classify Napoleon's method of war into a single model. In more recent times, much work has continued on Napoleon's contribution to the military art and military theory. Although others have attempted to quantify Napoleon's ideas into Maxims, Jay Luvaas and David Chandler have done the most extensive recent work on Napoleon's theories. Without their ability

and effort in this area, this study would have been far more difficult. Their tireless combing of Napoleon's letters and writings helped to narrow the search for a more modern study of Napoleon. In essence, the groundwork for a comparison of Napoleon's theories with another writer had been laid.

However, almost no work has been done on Charles De Gaulle's military theory. Although many biographies of De Gaulle have been written, few have focused on his theoretical contributions, especially before the Second World War. Historians shied away from De Gaulle's writings simply because they seemed to have little historical significance. Consequently, this study is the first example of a comprehensive analysis of De Gaulle's approach to the principles of war. His writings serve best as an illustration of the importance of the Napoleonic method.

No work has been done on a comparison between the theories of Napoleon and De Gaulle. No historian has previously tried to compare their works. Although De Gaulle often mentions Napoleon in his writings, only one historian has previously attempted any type of comparison. Jacques Godechot published an article in 1981 dealing with this subject.¹ In truth, Godechot compared the two men as civil-military authorities. He wanted to analyze the heritage of Napoleon's reign as evidenced in De Gaulle's period of power in the French Fifth Republic (1958-1969). He examined the individual initiative shown by commanders, an idea very important to both men and described at length in this thesis. In addition, Godechot looked at the attempts by Napoleon, and later De Gaulle, to obtain public support for the war effort. He also analyzed each man's outlook on the resolution of disputes between military and political

¹ See Jacques Godechot, "De Gaulle: Historien de la Révolution et l'Empire," *Annales*

planners. Thus, Godechot did compare the two men, but only on the basis of their role in government. He did not try to offer any opinion on Napoleon's importance to military theory, in France and the world.

Basically, this thesis is not intended as a comprehensive comparison between two men. Instead, it is focused on the military theories of these two great French leaders of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A full comparison of the two men, perhaps allowing for a pronouncement of Napoleon's importance to military and civil affairs alike, is still required. History and government in general would benefit greatly from such a work, because it would clearly demonstrate the proper method of governance in an executive-dominated state. Napoleon dominated France and Europe in the nineteenth century; in reality, he set the stage for the development of the modern world.

CHAPTER 1

THE MILITARY THEORETICIANS BEFORE NAPOLEON

Military theory did not begin with Napoleon, and it certainly did not end with his death. Rather, the history of military thought is rich with interesting characters and obscure ideas. The period immediately before Bonaparte's birth – the middle to late eighteenth century – was among the greatest periods of theoretical writings. The *philosophes*, with their brand of scientific and rational outlook on the world, forced a reexamination of life. This analysis spread into the world of warfare, as theoreticians sprang up all over Europe, each attempting to quantify and prescribe warfare. The most important theoreticians in the era before Napoleon must be analyzed in chronological order, compared against Napoleon's ideas so that the ancestry becomes clear. However, two exceptions to the chronological order must be made. Pierre Joseph de Bourcet and Jacques Antoine Hippolyte, Comte de Guibert stand as probably the two greatest influences on the eventual military system of Napoleon. As such, they must be analyzed at the conclusion of this chapter, with their role in the creation of Napoleonic theory analyzed in full. Of course, Napoleon's background and military education deserve a brief mention, as they contain elements of many different theorists.

The seventeenth century saw only seventy publications dealing specifically with the art of war. Between 1748 and 1756, twenty-five publications were introduced to the

salons and schools. In the years following, from 1756 to 1789, over one hundred more books and pamphlets interested in the art of war surfaced.¹ This massive explosion of theory could not help but advance the study of warfare and its basic ideas. Another influence came from the American War of Independence. French soldiers, like Lafayette and Rochambeau, journeyed to the English colonies to fight against the British. They learned a new system of warfare, and brought back with them a new tradition of open skirmishers hidden behind obstacles.² In essence, the colonists did not fight in line or column like their European counterparts. They put sharpshooters in advance positions with muskets, allowing them to pick off advancing British soldiers. The French took this idea to heart, and it eventually became a part of basic French doctrine.

At the same time, the French military was undergoing a number of changes. The reforms of Victor-François, Duc de Broglie, Jacques-Philippe, Duc de Choiseul and others, to be discussed later, were coming into effect. Jean Baptiste Vacquette de Gribeauval introduced a series of artillery reforms that made the French cannon the envy of Europe. He introduced the principle of interchangeable parts, while also improving the accuracy and mobility of the guns.³ The radical changes in the French army, along with the massive increase in writings on military theory, set the stage for the appearance of Napoleon as a military giant. Born in 1769, Napoleon probably read many of the theoretical debates, including works by Frederick the Great of Prussia, Henry Lloyd (a

¹ Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought from the Enlightenment to Clausewitz*, (Oxford, 1989), 25.

² Theodore Ayrault Dodge, *Great Captains: Napoleon, I*, (London, 1907), 24.

³ Edward Mead Earle, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, (New York, 1967), 62.

British mercenary) and Jean Turpin de Crissé, among others.⁴ There can be no doubt that his reading and his military education profoundly influenced the young Napoleon. He was placed first in a military school in Brienne, moving from there to the École Militaire in Paris. After earning his commission, he was sent to the artillery school at Auxonne, when he was first exposed to the ideas of Jean Du Teil, Jacques Antoine Hippolyte Guibert, and Pierre Joseph Bourcet. These experiences shaped Napoleon's military beliefs, and he followed their ideas during his campaigns, especially the Italian campaign of 1796-7.⁵ Napoleon's military education has often been rated as among the best in Europe for his era. The vestiges of the theorists before Napoleon clearly exist in his writings and campaigns. The Emperor was not an innovator; rather, he combined the disparate theories of his forerunners, in the process beginning a military revolution and changing the map of Europe.

The early eighteenth century, in the period immediately following the Treaty of Utrecht (1714), saw the beginning of a decline in French military fortunes. Louis XV and his ministers were defeated in a succession of wars. Jean Charles, Chevalier de Folard, wrote during this first quarter century. He wrote extensively on the need for a column in battle, eschewing the old method of fighting in opposing lines. He envisioned an extremely solid column, between twenty and sixty men across, advancing and rupturing the enemy line at several points.⁶ Folard represented the first attempt at a

⁴ David G. Chandler, *The Campaigns of Napoleon*, (New York, 1966), 139.

⁵ Ibid., 7. See also J. Colin, *L'Éducation Militaire de Napoléon*, (Paris, 1900). This work is perhaps the best discussion of Napoleon's military background until Robert S. Quimby's *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare*, (New York, 1957). Quimby's work gives a more modern outlook, and is in English for non-French readers.

⁶ Robert S. Quimby, *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare*, (New York, 1957), 29-31.

systematization of warfare. He did not like the paradigm created by Eugène of Savoy and Gustavus Adolphus in the seventeenth century, of small set-piece battles. Instead, he felt that the use of a system, instead of relying only on experience, would help a commander. To this end, he wrote *Nouvelle Découvertes sur la Guerre* in 1724.⁷

Folard's work represented a breakthrough in military theory in a number of different ways. First, he created the first step in the general progression towards modern theories of war and the Napoleonic method. He inspired others to search for a better system, a better means of waging war.⁸ In addition, he introduced a number of new concepts to the old method. As mentioned above, he created the idea of advance by column. His vision was basically predicated on the old Greek phalanx, which was virtually invulnerable to attack. He wanted to find the same effect as the phalanx, inspiring hope in his men while intimidating the enemy.⁹ The Chevalier put great stock in the psychological value of attack, much like Napoleon emphasized seventy-five years later. He wanted to focus attack on the enemy's army, forcing them to break and run in the face of his massive column attack. In essence, Folard was the first to advocate shock tactics in the battlefield. He felt that he could break a hole in the center of his enemy's line, causing them to break and allowing him to gain central position.¹⁰ Although Folard's theory was not without fault, he tried to include almost every important aspect of

⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁹ Brent Nosworthy, *With Musket, Cannon and Sword: Battle Tactics of Napoleon and his Enemies*, (New York, 1996), 36.

¹⁰ Gat, *Origins*, 28; Quimby, *Background*, 31.

warfare in his theory. He provided the basis for another Napoleonic tenet: combined arms. Unfortunately for Folard, he did not see the importance of artillery. He thought of the guns as useful only in sieges, as an adjunct arm of the infantry. He did, on the other hand, see the usefulness of the incorporation of infantry and cavalry into a single unit, using each as necessary.¹¹

Folard's vision, however, was not received particularly well. The soldiers of Europe did not immediately adopt his system; in fact, the use of columns was resisted as military leaders preferred to maintain seventeenth century methods. At this point, the Marshal Maurice de Saxe came upon the scene. In essence, Saxe served as a European mercenary, a man for hire to the highest bidder. He fought in a series of wars from the 1720s until his death in 1750. His primary work, *Mes Reveries sur l'Art de Guerre*, was published posthumously. His work was a major influence on both Frederick the Great and Napoleon, who incorporated a number of his principles into his work. The Marshal advocated marching in step, a method that allowed for faster deployment of troops. This marching in step was required by Saxe's occasional use of columns for attack.¹² The use of columns was rare at this time, as Folard's theories had hardly gained any notice.

Saxe's mechanical improvements in the use of an army did not stop there. He was the first to address the use of skirmishers in the front of formation, the vigorous pursuit of a retreating enemy, and the importance of troop morale on operations.¹³ Saxe wanted skirmishers to sit along the length of the enemy's advance, picking them off as they

¹¹ Quimby, *Background*, 34.

¹² Steven Ross, *From Flintlock to Rifle: Infantry Tactics, 1740-1866*, (London, 1979), 33.

¹³ Quimby, *Background*, 41.

advanced.¹⁴ This use predated the ideas of the American Revolution cited above. All of these disparate aspects eventually found their way into Napoleonic theory, as the Emperor's use of cavalry matched almost exactly the system and deployment advocated by Saxe. In fact, Saxe, along with the Duc de Broglie, is often credited with the idea of independently operating "legions," later divisions or corps in the French system. He also advocated the use of combined arms, although he resisted the eventual incorporation of artillery and cavalry into combined units with infantry.¹⁵ The use of these combined arms cannot be overlooked as an important aspect of Saxe's theory. He wanted to incorporate both aspects of the force, disregarding artillery, into the attack. He wanted waves of cavalry and infantry to advance into the enemy.¹⁶ This idea is very similar to the method eventually employed by Napoleon, with the exception of Saxe's refusal to combine forces into single units. The French Revolutionary armies are often credited as the first to live off the land. However, the Marshal actually conceived of this idea in the 1730s. He did not want to rely on extended trains, wishing instead to take everything from the local area.¹⁷ This use of the surroundings, instead of a reliance on a huge supply train, made the armies more mobile and less susceptible to maneuver on the part of the enemy.

The development of Napoleon's principles of war, on the other hand, also owed much to Saxe. He conceived of the necessity for a unity of command. He did not want

¹⁴ Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 248.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49-53.

¹⁶ Maurice de Saxe, *My Reveries upon the Art of War* (1734), in Major Thomas R. Philips, ed., *Roots of Strategy*, (Harrisburg, PA, 1940), 236-7.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 256.

the placement of troops and other forces left to subordinate commanders. Instead, he advocated the oversight of the supreme commander. He felt that the commander owed his job to genius, not luck or political manipulation. Consequently, he should direct all activities of his force.¹⁸ Saxe did envision a certain personality for his leader. The command could not be unified under an ordinary person. This leader needed a sort of *coup d'oeil*, although it was not given this title by Saxe. He also needed courage, intelligence and health in order to seize advantage in battle.¹⁹ This ideal leader, as it turned out, seemed to be embodied in the person of Bonaparte. He eventually used the ideas expounded by Saxe to great effect, despite the fact that he was using larger armies than those conceived of by Saxe. In addition, Saxe laid the groundwork for another of Napoleon's principles of war. He wanted to use deception to help defeat his enemy. Bourcet especially seized upon this idea in his discussions on mountain warfare. The need for security in this circumstance was paramount, as the enemy could not learn of the army's intentions.²⁰ This idea, once again, was used by Napoleon. He often liked to maneuver his forces around the outside of his enemy, misleading them as to his true intentions.

France had a civilian reformer of the military during this period as well. The increasing systematization of war had begun to spread into intellectual circles, and it had become vogue to theorize on the art of war. Jacques-François de Chastenet, Marquis de Puysegur wrote the *Art of War by Principles and Rules* in 1748. He attempted to create a

¹⁸ Ibid., 295.

¹⁹ Quimby, *Background*, 59.

²⁰ Saxe, *Reveries*, 298.

new system of war, contrary to the ideas set forth by Folard as well as the existing Ancien Régime structure.²¹ Puységur wanted to see a new system of simple principles put into action in warfare. He did not like the idea, held by many military officers, that the true art of war could be learned only through experience. Consequently, he attempted to quantify his ideas in his book. Contemporaries largely discounted him, as he was an outsider to the field.²²

However, Puységur's ideas did not disappear entirely. A close reading of his works and primary ideas shows a number of theories present in Napoleonic practice. For instance, he commented often on the effectiveness of infantry in a number of situations. Hardly a proponent of combined arms, the Marquis instead saw the power of infantry. As an historical scholar, he saw that through history the armies with the most powerful infantries usually emerged victorious. Thus, he proposed that an infantry aware of its strength was invulnerable to cavalry attack. In fact, this idea, along with Saxe's theory, stood as the first proposal for the use of square formation in battle against cavalry.²³ The invulnerability of infantry could only occur in the proper formation. Moreover, Puységur also contributed to Napoleon's principles of war. Napoleon almost never entrenched himself on the defensive. Instead, he theorized that an attack could almost never fail, due to his genius and the timidity of the opposing forces. The Marquis followed much the same line, but fifty years before Bonaparte's rise to power. He advocated *l'offensive à outrance* in an effort to demoralize opponents. The constant pounding of a series of

²¹ Gat, *Origins*, 34.

²² Quimby, *Background*, 16.

²³ Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 378; Quimby, *Background*, 53.

cavalry and infantry charges could not fail to break the enemy.²⁴ This formed the basis for another Napoleonic principle, offensive. He felt that he must always take the offensive against any enemy, because the malaise of a defensive position could affect the value of the fighting force.

The single most influential military figure of the eighteenth century was Frederick the Great, King of Prussia. During his reign, he defeated the forces of most of the European powers, redefining the military-state system in Europe. The rest of Europe attempted to create military systems based on his model. The Marshal Saxe and Frederick were the most brilliant commanders of their era; however, neither was an innovator. Each man performed excellent feats within the boundaries of the existing system.²⁵ Napoleon certainly benefited from Frederick's primary tactical innovation. Indeed, all of Europe quickly adopted Frederick's oblique advance after he successfully employed this movement in the Seven Years War. This achievement stands as Frederick's most important legacy.²⁶ Frederick also helped Napoleon in a strategic sense. He laid considerable groundwork for the later Napoleonic principles of war. Of course, a good campaign must first have a clear objective. Frederick called for a strong staff system to plan effectively before battle, delineating the objective and giving the army the proper direction.²⁷ The army could not function effectively without this clear objective.

²⁴ Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 52.

²⁵ Ross, *From Flintlock*, 33.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Frederick II, King of Prussia, *Instruction to His Generals* (1747), Major Thomas R. Philips, ed., *Roots of Strategy*, (Harrisburg, PA, 1940), 314-23.

On the other hand, the military could not function effectively without a strong leader. The responsibility for military affairs needed to be in the hands of one man; it could not be separated and diluted by the influence of many different people. This commander needed to practice the military art in its highest form. Thus, the command needed to be unified under one man that possessed *coup d'oeil*.²⁸ A strong leader was necessary to make this principle function properly. This idea clearly parallels that of Napoleon; in fact, as mentioned above, he read some of Frederick's work, and is often said to have admired Frederick's *Instructions* to his generals. A general officer, in Frederick's view, was expected to control a variety of different forces, unifying everything under one man's authority. This idea included the use of a compact, highly organized cavalry force that could be used as shock against the enemy.²⁹ This rapidly moving force could exploit enemy forces to the advantage of their commander. The use of cavalry in this way coincides exactly with Napoleon's use of Marshal Joachim Murat and his independent corps of cavalry. The Frederickian view of military affairs is perhaps best summed up by his words to his generals. When speaking of conflict, he remarked that "war is decided only by battles, and it is not finished except by them."³⁰ Napoleon thought along this same vein. He believed that only a victory on the battlefield against an enemy force could provide him with victory. He did not adhere to the idea of

²⁸ Ibid., 341. The origins of the term *coup d'oeil* are murky and uncertain. It means, roughly, a burst of insight that a commander receives on the field. In essence, the commander must possess the ability to rapidly and intelligently decide the proper moment for attack, reinforcement and possibly retreat. In theory, only a true military genius can effectively decide these issues. For a more thorough discussion, see Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed., trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, (Princeton, NJ, 1976).

²⁹ Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 36.

³⁰ Ibid., 391.

attacking an enemy's communications, supply or populace in an effort to win a massive victory and knock his opponent from the war.

However, Frederick's contribution to Napoleonic warfare did not stop at this point. Remarkably, his theories and comments, even those from a simple instruction to his general officers, coincided almost exactly with the Napoleonic conceptions of warfare. As noted above, Frederick preferred to attack his enemy headlong. He did not want to wait for the perfect moment. "Thus, I prefer ... the temerity of the offensive."³¹ Once again, the Napoleonic conception of offensive at the first possible moment was evident. Frederick did not feel the need to wait for an opportunity. He disliked the defensive. Finally, Frederick also envisioned two further principles later adopted by Napoleon. He wanted his army to use surprise, while employing security to stop a counterattack by the enemy. His view of security existed on two levels: tactical and strategic. On the tactical level, he employed pickets with mixed arms to stop the enemy from approaching without warning and without resistance. At the same time, he wanted secure communications to prevent an encirclement and cataclysmic defeat.³² He could stop his forces from being overwhelmed simply by protecting them from advancing armies. He kept his communications reasonably discreet in an effort to hide his intentions from the enemy. Only through secure communications could the army effectively surprise and destroy the enemy. At this point, his ideas moved onto another principle, surprise. He wanted to use surprise effectively, but he felt that it required

³¹ Ibid., 315.

³² Ibid., 337, 372.

extensive information; consequently, he diverged from Napoleon.³³ Frederick was the ultimate practitioner of conservative warfare, the system later followed by the Prussian General Staff in their terrible defeats at the hands of the French and Napoleon. The French leader advocated risk-taking, whereas Frederick feared defeat upon exposure. All the same, Frederick's influence on Napoleonic theory simply should not be ignored.

The Chevalier de Folard, as noted above, was among the first proponents of the so-called *ordre profond*, or the column. As the years progressed, debate raged between his disciples and those arguing for the *ordre mince*, or the line formation. One of Folard's disciples, the Baron François-Jean de Mesnil-Durand, came out even more strongly than his famous predecessor in support of the column. Mesnil-Durand published his *Projet d'un Ordre françois en tactique* in 1755, calling for the same deep, wide columns and shock value in punching a hole in the enemy line.³⁴ In the end, however, Mesnil-Durand's contribution to Napoleonic warfare was minimal. Napoleon certainly used the *ordre profond* in battle, but he employed the method advocated by Guibert, discussed below. However, Mesnil-Durand's ideas on shock were reasonably effective, as was his inclusion of combined arms in his writing. He wanted the army to use cavalry both as a shock weapon and as a screen, a form of security for operations.³⁵ To many, Mesnil-Durand contributed "nothing of value to French tactics."³⁶ Indeed, some of Mesnil-Durand's ideas were not well accepted, and some seemed bizarre. He refused to

³³ Ibid., 368.

³⁴ Quimby, *Background*, 63; Gat, *Origins*, 38-9.

³⁵ Quimby, *Background*, 65.

³⁶ Ibid., 232.

admit the importance of the firearm in the warfare of his time. He felt that firearms were merely a passing phase. Instead, he advocated infantry advance with the *arme blanche*, men armed only with bayonets or pikes. He felt the shock was enhanced by this idea. He even referred to cannon as “ineffective.”³⁷ In the end, Mesnil-Durand did make a lasting contribution to the art of warfare, especially in France. He gained the support of the Marshal de Broglie, the greatest French soldier under Louis XV.³⁸ This support, along with the discussion his system engendered, led to further advances and the eventual creation of Napoleon’s military theory.

Broglie was indeed the greatest soldier of the later years of the Ancien Régime. His opinion was extremely important in the shaping of French doctrine, strategy and tactics. He is considered the father of skirmishers in France, creating independent companies of these sharpshooters in 1759-60.³⁹ These skirmisher companies became very important in the modern system of warfare, especially after the reforms instituted by Rochambeau and Lafayette after their return from the American colonies. The flexibility instituted by Broglie and the Duc de Choiseul helped to create another Napoleonic principle of war. In fact, the foundation for the corps d’armée system was laid during this time period. Broglie instituted independent, autonomous divisions, each commanded by a general.⁴⁰ These units lived off the land, operating without support from the other units for days at a time. The flexibility in the command structure instituted by Broglie helped

³⁷ Ibid., 71-7.

³⁸ Ibid., 233.

³⁹ Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 249.

⁴⁰ Earle, *Makers*, 62.

pave the way for the reforms sparked by Guibert and his theories twenty years later. On the other hand, Broglie resisted some of the modernity imposed on him. He did not want to incorporate combined arms into his system.⁴¹ He died knowing that he did not allow the creation of a combined force in France during his lifetime. In this way, he directly contradicted the later theories of Bonaparte. On the whole, however, Broglie set the stage for the eventual arrival of Napoleon on the scene.

A number of less important, relatively obscure theorists followed Broglie's departure from the scene. The Count Turpin de Crissé (or Crispé) contributed to military science in the middle of the 1750s. He wrote a two-volume work entitled *Essai sur l'art de la Guerre*, published in 1754 and 1757. He attempted to expand Vauban's ideas on siege warfare to form a general system of operations, but his work received little fanfare.⁴² He was unable to arrive at a system that adequately simplified the intricacies of war. His attempt to create a system based on mathematical and geometric principles, however, became popular in the years following Napoleon. In any case, he did make one small contribution to the Napoleonic theory of war. He believed in the use of cavalry for shock value, as did many of predecessors. He saw that application of cavalry at a decisive point could blow a hole in the opponent's lines, driving them back and ensuring victory.⁴³ This idea, seemingly simple and obvious, formed the basis for mass, another Napoleonic principle. In essence, a massed attack against an important point on the enemy front could cause a breakthrough, leading to a breakneck retreat and pursuit.

⁴¹ Quimby, *Background*, 75.

⁴² Gat, *Origins*, 37.

⁴³ Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 313.

Napoleon used this idea repeatedly in war, often breaking things down to a siege analogy. A breakthrough was required on the battlefield much as it was required against a stronghold.

An often overlooked, but extremely important, contributor to Napoleonic ideas was Paul Gideon Joly de Maizeroy, writing in the 1760s and 1770s. His primary work, the *Cours de Tactique, Théoretique, Pratique et Historique* (1766) laid out a portion of his principles of war. He also published the *Théorie de la Guerre* (1777), a further expansion of his ideas. In essence, his principles of strategy and war aligned closely with those of Napoleon.⁴⁴ For instance, he encouraged attacking with mass, apparently taking the idea from Crissé. However, he could not find a method that allowed him to move his force quickly and with strength.⁴⁵ In the end, Napoleon was able to find this combination, moving large armies faster than any European armies had ever traveled. Maizeroy also believed strongly in the column for movement and for shock value. He did not subscribe to Mesnil-Durand's advocacy of the column over all else. Rather, he felt that situations dictated the proper formation for troops.⁴⁶ Overall, Maizeroy lacked the instinct to push his theories a little further. He did not reach the level of Guibert, a man that would take the salons by storm in 1772. He did not have the style of innovation of Bourcet, who created many of the principles relied on by Napoleon. Indeed, Maizeroy had no eye for strategy, and he regarded maneuver as superfluous.⁴⁷ This principle was

⁴⁴ Gat, *Origins*, 39-43.

⁴⁵ Quimby, *Background*, 189.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 185-90.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 197-8.

put to use by Napoleon, as he moved troops into and around his enemy as well as any general in history.

The influence of the Duc de Broglie continued to be felt long after his death. France remained mired in a system of rigid formality, hoping to achieve the same success found by Frederick the Great in the Seven Years War. This attempt moved the French to turn to a Prussian staff officer, the Baron de Pirch, in an attempt to find a winning formula. The French *Ordinance of 1776*, the last prescriptive pamphlet put out by the Ancien Régime, was based on Pirch's *Mémoire raisonné sur les Parties les plus essentielles de la Tactique* (1773).⁴⁸ In reality, Pirch was a minor figure in the world of military theory; however, his ascendancy in France proved the desperate need of the French for a new brand of military leadership, not to mention a new system. The ordinance relied on fighting in line, without any regard for the new ideas of column movement and advance. It did not allow for any sort of movement with independent units; indeed, there was little flexibility between units. Pirch's ideas were a far cry from the innovation of Maizeroy, Saxe, and even Broglie. The formalized movements, based on Frederick's order of battle and his oblique movements, further restricted the French.⁴⁹ Thus, Pirch represented an important step in the progression of military theory towards Napoleon. France needed an innovation, a new idea that would change the paradigm and allow the nation to gain some measure of success on the battlefield. The excessive formalism of Pirch's system could not help but lead to some innovation on the part of the best theoretical minds in the country.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 201, 205.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 208-9.

Among the innovators that came to prominence in the late eighteenth century was a pair of brothers, Chevalier Jean and Baron Jean-Pierre Du Teil. The influence of these brothers on Napoleon should not be overlooked. The Baron taught at Auxonne, the artillery school that Napoleon attended during his youth. At this time, Napoleon was exposed to all the great ideas of the new military theory, including Gribeauval, of whom the Du Teil brothers were disciples.⁵⁰ The artillery arm at this point in the history of warfare was often looked on as simply an adjunct to the infantry. Many theoreticians simply could not envision the true importance of the artillery in both strategic and tactical senses. The Du Teil brothers helped to create Napoleon's conception of principles of war simply through the use of artillery.

Basically, the employment of artillery as a mass against a single point could be used for infantry or cavalry, as could the idea of rapid movement, maneuver, security, economy of force, surprise or unity of command. In fact, Napoleon spent a holiday during his stay at Auxonne at the home of Jean-Pierre Du Teil, his instructor. They discussed military theory, not only that of artillery but also grand tactics and strategy.⁵¹ Napoleon first discovered the ideas of Guibert and Bourcet at this point. In any case, the writings of Jean Du Teil, including his famous *De l'Usage de l'Artillerie nouvelle dans la Guerre de Campagne* (1778), as taught by his younger brother, helped instill the general principles of war in Bonaparte.⁵² The theorist advocated a number of different ideas that

⁵⁰ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 138.

⁵¹ Quimby, *Background*, 291.

⁵² John R. Elting, *The Super-Strategists*, (New York, 1985), 145.

would later become codified as principles of war. Most of Du Teil's theories, as mentioned above, concentrated only on artillery.

However, the principles he created were applicable everywhere. He did not like to place all the guns of the artillery in one place.⁵³ This idea represented the embodiment of both security and economy of force, both modern principles of war. The timeless principles incorporated by Napoleon did not stop at this point, however. Du Teil also called for the use of artillery against the enemy force, massed so as to create a hole at a decisive point.⁵⁴ Napoleon often commented on this idea. However, late in his career, Napoleon began to misuse the artillery, breaking the principles he had inherited from Du Teil. The incorporation of poorer troops, young conscripts and foreigners into Napoleon's armies decreased their quality; consequently, he had to use massed artillery, a technique that did not work as effectively as a combined force, another idea advocated by the Du Teils.⁵⁵ They wanted the artillery established as an equal arm, used in conjunction with the cavalry and the infantry. Indeed, the artillery could play a decisive role if given the chance. The brothers also called for another principle in the direction of the artillery and, by extension, the army itself. The slow-moving, supply-bound armies of the past simply did not make war very efficiently. The fortresses created by Vauban and other military architects had become too important. Instead, armies should become more mobile, more capable of rapid movement without reliance on supply lines and

⁵³ Quimby, *Background*, 298.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 296-8.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 292.

fortresses.⁵⁶ The principles and ideas advocated by the Du Teil brothers had universal application; consequently, they were incorporated by Napoleon into his general procedures as early as the Italian Campaign of 1796-7. On the other hand, Napoleon did not need the basic ideas regarding artillery until the eventual decline in his armies. At that point, he forgot many of the lessons he had learned earlier. The disregard he showed toward his own principles, as created by the Du Teil brothers, certainly contributed to the eventual collapse of his military machine.

Before a discussion of the influence of Bourcet and Guibert, a discussion of Napoleon's military background must include a brief mention of Lazare Carnot. He served as a commissioner for war on the Committee of Public Safety, and eventually became a Director. He became known as the "organizer of victory" for his contributions to the creation of the *levée en masse* and the French Revolutionary war machine. In general, he gave his commanders three primary directives. First, they were ordered to live off the land, an idea he borrowed from some of the theorists mentioned in this work. Second, he did not want his generals to concern themselves with casualties. He wanted victory at all costs. Finally, he ordered them to fight decisive battles. To this end, he gave a specific directive to avoid geographic objectives.⁵⁷ He felt that these objectives would fall after a successful campaign by the French forces. Napoleon relied on all of these directives during his career as a general and Emperor. He especially relied on the destruction of the opposing army, the essence of Carnot's instructions.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 293.

⁵⁷ Ross, *From Flintlock*, 82.

One of the most important, and also the most mysterious, influences on Napoleon was the French general Pierre Joseph de Bourcet, an Ancien Régime staff officer. He was almost legendary for his ability in staff work, a task to which he was wed by virtue of his petty noble status. He was never allowed to command troops, a privilege reserved for the *Noblesse de l'Epée*. Bourcet, a Lieutenant General and recipient of the *Grand Croix de l'Ordre de Saint Louis*, fought in the Seven Years War, the Corsican War of Independence and every other conflict during the era.⁵⁸ Little is known of the rest of Bourcet's life, and few copies of his pamphlet, entitled *Principes de la Guerre des Montagnes*, survived. It appears that Napoleon was given a copy of pamphlet, written between 1764 and 1771 but never published, during his stay at Auxonne.⁵⁹ In any case, his influence on Bonaparte, especially as evidenced during the Italian campaign, cannot be denied.⁶⁰ Bourcet is widely considered the true father of the Napoleonic principles of war, as Napoleon discovered that Bourcet's mountain principles could be used for fighting in other areas. Bourcet's principles continued to live on into modern warfare, as strategists on the modern battlefield use them.

Bourcet's first great contribution to Napoleonic warfare was in staff work and unity of command. The modern idea of a general staff system and command unified

⁵⁸ Pierre Joseph de Bourcet, *Memoires Militaires sur les Frontières de la France, du Piemont, et de la Savoie, depuis l'embouchure du Var jusqu'au lac de Geneve*, (Berlin, 1801), I-IV. Bourcet, ironically, was also charged with the construction of fortifications surrounding Toulon during the 1760s. The French Revolutionary Forces during the federalist revolt of 1793-4 would later besiege these fortifications. None other than Napoleon Bonaparte, perhaps the greatest disciple of Bourcet's military theories, commanded the artillery in this siege.

⁵⁹ Quimby, *Background*, 176.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 139.

under one individual is widely considered to stem primarily from Bourcet.⁶¹ Considered France's most expert and experienced staff officer, Bourcet coined the term "estimate of the situation." In essence, he advocated the planning of a battle in advance by the general and his staff advisor. The decision on a course of strategic action could be taken only after a thorough look at the advantages and disadvantages of each possibility.⁶² Of course, this idea could not be taken to extremes. Bourcet did not advocate that tactical decision-making lie in the hands of a staff officer. Rather, he advised that a general rely on his staff for help in assessing terrain and creating a strategic plan. Napoleon used this idea to great effect, as he regarded maps as extremely important in planning before the fact. It is interesting to note that Bourcet was widely known for his ability to read maps and survey terrain expertly.⁶³ The influence of his reliance on maps was seen with Napoleon and Berthier, not to mention the various aides-de-camp.

Bourcet, due to his background in staff work, soon realized the importance of a new organizational structure. His work, focused primarily on war in the mountains, called for the creation of independent divisions, marching in column. These units needed independence in order to move quickly and in an organized fashion through narrow mountain passes and defiles. In addition, communications would be extremely difficult in this situation. Independence was an absolute must for these units until their reconcentration at the point of attack.⁶⁴ This idea incorporated two principles that would

⁶¹ Paddy Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France*, (Harrisburg, PA, 1998), 165.

⁶² Elting, *Super-Strategists*, 145. In fact, Bourcet's emphasis on planning preceded the use of "wargaming" by modern theorists by almost two centuries.

⁶³ Bourcet, *Memoires*, V.

⁶⁴ Griffith, *Art of War*, 197.

later come to form a large portion of Napoleonic theory. First, the corps d'armée system, composed of semi-autonomous units, was based entirely on this premise. Of course, Bourcet presupposed a strong unity of command in this instance, as the troops must unite under one commander-in-chief. Secondly, Bourcet advocated the use of mass against a critical point. The rapid reconcentration of troops at the decisive point just prior to battle could serve as both shock and mass against the enemy. A large force thrust against a weak point in the enemy defensive position would cause a breakthrough, leading to retreat and victory.

Finally, Bourcet wanted to see a general act offensively. For Bourcet, the principle of offensive incorporated three Napoleonic principles: offensive, security, and surprise. He said that the offensive general must hide his troop strength and strike intention by disseminating his troops into several corps along the front, all in reach of the enemy.⁶⁵ In other words, he did not want the commander to sit back and wait for attack; instead, he must strike the enemy whenever possible. He advocated security through secrecy along the front. The enemy could not be made aware of any of his army's movements. Of course, Bourcet included the idea of surprise by keeping his intentions from his enemy. The opposing commander could not know the proper defensive measures if he did not know the planned attack of Bourcet's commander. Bourcet's influence on Napoleon and his theories is unquestioned. His small pamphlet, with even smaller circulation, was a leading cause of the military revolution led by Napoleon at the turn of the century. Only one man, Guibert, surpassed his influence on Napoleon.

⁶⁵ Quimby, *Background*, 177.

Nearly every Napoleonic principle, at least in part, owes its existence to the writings of Jacques Antoine Hippolyte, Comte de Guibert. He wrote his *Essai Général de Tactique* in 1772 at the age of 29, changing forever the face of French military theory.⁶⁶ He quickly became a so-called “lion of the salons,” becoming a part of the French Enlightenment and considering himself a *philosophe*. His general ideas became the basis for the French Revolutionary Army doctrine, adopted into law by the *Ordinance of 1791*. Napoleon and other officers, obviously, studied this manual of war. It contributed greatly to Napoleon’s system of war and the principles he eventually developed.⁶⁷ He created a new paradigm for war in the eighteenth century, a paradigm that would endure largely until the Prussian wars of the 1860s and 1870s. He envisioned two major changes in the new system of war: the development of a citizen army and the implementation of a war of movement.⁶⁸ Both of these ideas eventually came to pass with the French Revolution and the accession of Napoleon Bonaparte to power. The *levée en masse* instituted by the Revolutionary government ensured the existence of a citizen army, made up not of mercenaries but of French citizens. Napoleon became the father of the modern war of movement, maneuvering his massive armies faster than had ever been done. In the end, Guibert helped to temper the debate between proponents of the line and the column. He proposed a system that utilized the greater speed and

⁶⁶ Earle, *Makers*, 62.

⁶⁷ Gat, *Origins*, 52.

⁶⁸ Earle, *Makers*, 63. Interestingly, Guibert eventually tried to refute his former statements in a new work. He was ultimately unsuccessful, and most of his ideas were incorporated into Revolutionary and Napoleonic doctrine.

flexibility of the column with the more massive firepower of the line.⁶⁹ This combination silenced the critics, and opened the door for a variety of further innovations.

Guibert advocated extensively the use of all three arms of warfare: artillery, infantry and cavalry. These three arms could be combined, according to Guibert, in a coherent, quickly moving whole. He was truly the first theorist to include the artillery in this combined force.⁷⁰ He had realized the importance of the Gribeauval reforms to the artillery and the military in general. Much like the theories of the Du Teil brothers, Guibert's ideas included massed artillery that fired on both infantry and opposing artillery. This mass of artillery, however, needed to move at the same pace as the advancing infantry for support. The destruction of the enemy infantry was its ultimate goal.⁷¹ However, Guibert's principles of a force of combined arms did not stop at this point. He continued to describe the optimum role of cavalry in this combined force. He envisioned several different duties for the cavalry. Of course, as was the practice, they could be used for reconnaissance. Moreover, they could be employed as a screen to help with security against the enemy, as a shock weapon, and to pursue a defeated enemy.⁷² These uses clearly contain a number of Napoleonic principles. He used cavalry in much the same manner, for security, for the initial offensive attack in mass, and for the final killing blow. At this point in the history of warfare, cavalry was not often used to finish

⁶⁹ Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 104. The *ordre mixte*, the name given to the combination of column and line, as envisioned by Guibert, remained the primary style of fighting of the French forces until the advent of trench warfare and the addition of mechanized vehicles to the battlefield.

⁷⁰ Quimby, *Background*, 106.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 149-154.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 133-4.

off battles; instead, armies were allowed to retreat after conceding defeat. Guibert helped to change this idea.

As mentioned previously, Guibert contributed to nearly every Napoleonic principle of war. To begin with, he advocated the security as previously discussed. He did not want lines of communications threatened in any way, whether through enemy advance or capture of messages. Consequently, he wanted his army to live off the land, not having to contend with long lines of supply and communications.⁷³ He also discussed, at length, the ideas of offensive and mass. He hated the idea of passive defense and the use of fortifications and walls. He wanted the commander to continually advance, not waiting for the enemy's move.⁷⁴ Guibert wanted the forces to move in large contingents, focused on the critical point in the enemy line. This concept would help lead to breakthroughs in the enemy front, allowing the triumphant army to begin the pursuit and destruction of the enemy force.⁷⁵

Along the same lines, this brilliant theoretician called for the use of maneuver to put the enemy at a disadvantage. The commander could give battle on the field of his choosing through the accurate study of maps and topography.⁷⁶ At this point, the influence of Bourcet became evident. The former French staff officer had commented on the importance of topography, maps and detailed planning in warfare. A successful campaign could be launched only after the conclusion of a period of study of the

⁷³ Ibid., 169.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 171.

⁷⁵ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 142.

⁷⁶ Quimby, *Background*, 157-67.

situation. At the same time, the commander needed to remain flexible and keep his planning simple.⁷⁷ He could not allow himself to become bogged down in the details of the operation and its aftermath. Simplicity stood as a principle in Napoleonic warfare, and flexibility is perhaps best understood as a sub-unit of economy of force, the proper distribution of forces on the battlefield.

These forces could be commanded properly only by a “vast genius,” a “born general,” according to Guibert.⁷⁸ The command must be unified under this single person; however, this idea did not preclude the idea of flexibility in battle. On the contrary, Guibert advocated, much like Bourcet, the division of the army into fluid, independently operating divisions. These divisions remained under the control of the commander-in-chief while relying on the countryside for sustenance.⁷⁹ The old system of warfare simply would not work in trying to fulfill these requirements. The armies of the Ancien Régime had depended on the siegecraft strategy and system of forts developed by Vauban. This system was too expensive and cumbersome to work in a war of maneuver and movement. The sieges effected against these forts took a long time, and often they cost the besieging force many lives. The forts were effective only as auxiliary positions to help a mobile army, as a rapidly moving army could easily bypass or smash any stronghold on the flatlands of Europe. Moreover, these forts would not need protection, as the mobile army would need no prepared magazines.⁸⁰ Consequently, the *raison d'être* of a fortress was gone. Guibert, in effect, revolutionized the use of fortresses and

⁷⁷ Ibid., 155.

⁷⁸ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 140.

⁷⁹ Earle, *Makers*, 64; Gat, *Origins*, 52.

the movement of armies on European battlefields. He was probably the single greatest influence on the art of war that came to make up the Napoleonic principles of war.

The influence of the military thinkers of the Ancien Régime on Napoleon and his art of war should not be overlooked. In essence, Napoleon was a child of the later years of the reign of Louis XV and the reign of Louis XVI, owing to his birth in 1769. He was educated in France, coming under the tutelage of some of the finest minds among eighteenth century European military theorists. War, as practiced by Napoleon, changed the face of Europe in the space of ten years. He created a machine that was the envy of Europe. Indeed, it took fifteen years for his opponents to discover a method for countering his principles. The most telling examples of the importance of these principles exist in the instances in which Napoleon disregarded them and lost. Saxe, Maizeroy, Bourcet and Guibert, among a host of others, contributed mightily to the system compiled by Napoleon. They provided, to a large extent, the theoretical backing of the greatest military leader the world has ever seen.

⁸⁰ Earle, *Makers*, 65.

CHAPTER 2

OBJECTIVE

The art of war is not easily defined. Each passing military theorist provides his own definition and his own method guaranteed to provide victory. Charles De Gaulle has stated that “the sword is the axis of the world, and greatness cannot be shared.”¹ In other words, military dominance, at least in part, helps to shape world affairs. Moreover, only one power or state can achieve this dominance at a time. Consequently, the nations of Europe and the world find themselves constantly at war. However, these wars cannot be waged successfully without the first of the Napoleonic principles of war, objective. A nation at war, as well as its leader(s), must have a specific goal in mind at the outset. Of course, the lack of an objective often leads the offending nation into dire circumstances, as happened to the United States in Vietnam. Napoleon, commenting on the importance of a strong objective, wrote, “an irresolute general who acts without principles or plan ... often proves inferior in the battlefield.”² A good campaign plan, with a strong objective, was inherent to success on the battlefield. A general without the ability to make a decision before the campaign and adhere to it in principle was destined for failure. De Gaulle preferred to use examples in an effort to discuss the importance of this supreme

¹ Charles De Gaulle, *The Army of the Future*, (Philadelphia, 1941), 179.

² L.E. Henry, *Napoleon's War Maxims*, (London, 1899), LXXXIV, 40.

objective. In speaking of Louvois, the Secretary of State under Louis XIV, he wrote that this leader, “looked on war as ... a prolongation of policy. This, thanks to him, was not confined to establishing the objectives which the soldiers must attain but not overstep, and to allotting a strictly calculated expenditure for the people.”³ The General in this instance explained establishing the objectives which the soldiers must attain but not overstep, and to allotting a strictly calculated expenditure for the people.⁴ The army must follow a clearly defined principle while still fulfilling the requirements of the policy set forth. The Emperor Napoleon held much the same view. He conceived of the aforementioned principles of war, although he did not engage in slavish adherence to these guidelines. Instead, much like his view on a strong objective, a leader needed some room for maneuver. In essence, “all wars should be systematic, for every war should have an object, and be conducted in conformity with the principles and rules of the art.”⁵

Napoleon rarely had difficulty in discerning the objective of his attacks. Obviously, he had control of both the state and military apparatus after his accession to the position of First Consul in 1799. His opponents, however, often had difficulty in discerning his goals. The Campaign of 1805, fought against the forces of the Third Coalition, stands as a perfect example. Archduke Charles of Austria thought that Napoleon would return to his old campaign grounds in northern Italy. Marshal André Masséna deceived him, and Napoleon won stunning victories at Ulm and Austerlitz. His opponents had perhaps the most difficulty in deciphering the Emperor’s “purpose” in his

³ Charles De Gaulle, *The Edge of the Sword*, (London, 1960), 111.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ M. Barnow, *Military Maxims of Napoleon*, trans. J. Akerly, (New York, 1845), V, 9.

operations.⁶ Indeed, Napoleon's opponents, much like the Emperor himself, realized that a clear objective was a key to a successful operation. If they could accurately discern Bonaparte's intentions, they could move to counter his actions.

Napoleon certainly did not fight on a capricious whim or for the sake of a limited objective. Rather, he preferred to fight in order to achieve a major goal. For instance, he often spoke of fighting in an effort to reach a specifically tailored politico-military aim. In other words, he wanted to destroy the enemy's will to resist by knocking out their equilibrium in a decisive battle. The targeting of the enemy's army would help him achieve this end.⁷ He could then move on to a diplomatic or political settlement favorable to France and its Empire. Although Napoleon's intentions in this regard have often been assailed as the result of extreme egotism or megalomania, he did think of himself as a child of the French Revolution. He felt the need to defend and spread the Revolution; he felt this could be accomplished through conquest. Basically, he wanted to unite Europeans into one people, making the continent stronger as a whole.⁸ This statement may seem too altruistic for attribution to Napoleon. It was uttered during his exile on Saint Helena, so he may have been redefining his intentions for posterity.

Without a doubt, Napoleon's first political and military loyalties were to France. He wanted to assure a dominant French position in Europe and the world. He perceived himself as the defender of France, the man that would stop the Huns at the gates of Paris.

⁶ Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 154.

⁷ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 144.

⁸ Comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, III (book 5), (Boston, 1823), 126.

Napoleon proclaimed his main goal as “saving the nation.”⁹ In many of his battles, conquests and campaigns, Napoleon retained this mantra. His overriding purpose in battle was to gain French hegemony in Europe and achieve further glory for France. The French needed to keep this goal, a vestige of the wars immediately following the Revolution, in mind in order to achieve success. Above all else, even if European dominance was impossible, Napoleon wanted to maintain the honor, glory, and independence of France.¹⁰ Clearly, Napoleon believed in the necessity of the maintenance of a single, overriding objective. A larger objective, like the future of the nation, hung over all his operations.

Napoleon did not confine himself, moreover, to political and military goals like the dominance of France in Europe. Rather, his forces sometimes fought for purely ideological reasons.¹¹ France’s continual war with Britain was waged for a number of reasons, among them the conflict between the French egalitarian ideals and the British constitutional monarchy. Napoleon himself often felt persecuted due to the ideology of the French Revolution, ideals he was endeavoring to present to the rest of the continent. “Europe never ceased to make war upon France, her principles, and me; and we were compelled to destroy, to save ourselves from destruction.”¹² Thus, an ideological conflict led France to another clear objective in engaging in war: survival. The French needed to keep this idea in mind as they tried to fight off the Austrian, Russian, British or Prussian

⁹ Las Cases, *Mémoires*, II (book 3), 170.

¹⁰ Las Cases, *Mémoires*, I (book 1), 28.

¹¹ Robert B. Holtman, *The Napoleonic Revolution*, (Philadelphia, 1967), 45.

¹² Las Cases, *Mémoires*, I (book 2), 156.

troops that approached its frontiers. Basically, the survival of France depended on their actions as they stood on the front lines. The ideological crusade waged by France, in itself an objective of Revolutionary and Napoleonic war, led to a war for the right to exist.

The Napoleonic definition of an objective is not complete, however, without a discussion of his creation of specific battlefield objectives. Napoleonic military scholarship often asserts that the Emperor's primary goal in every campaign was the destruction of the enemy. This simplification aside, Napoleon formed plans well in advance. He actually created so-called "master plans" before devising the actual plan of campaign.¹³ These master plans contained, basically, the overall objective for the campaign, such as those mentioned above. Napoleon did not settle for simply sending his forces to fight for reasons unknown to his soldiers. In fact, he agonized over the plans for a campaign three to four months in advance.¹⁴ The creation of this final objective, of course, led to the creation of the exact method of waging war in a particular theater.

A plan of campaign could not stop at only a discussion of friendly maneuvers and ideals of battle. Instead, it also had to account for the movements and ideas of the enemy. A good plan, and consequently a good military objective, accounted for all the methods possibly utilized by the opposing force. "In forming the plan of a campaign, it is requisite to foresee everything the enemy may do, and to be prepared with the necessary

¹³ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 145.

¹⁴ Ibid. Napoleon, of course, did not do most of this planning on his own. He employed the Topographic Bureau in which he had worked so successfully as a junior officer in the planning of Masséna's 1795 campaigns in Italy. The Napoleonic planning process is much too complex to be discussed here, but see Chandler's work for a more complete description.

means to counteract it.”¹⁵ On the other hand, Napoleon did not believe that a campaign plan was set in stone. He felt that the objective of all military operations should remain constant; the means of obtaining the ultimate result was open to interpretation and dependent on the situation, ability of the commander, quality of the troops and the topography of the theater.¹⁶ Thus, flexibility was required in the application of an objective to the theater. A general that remained unable to change his ideas, in other words falling into the trap of an *a priori* doctrine, was doomed to fail.

Planning did not mean simply the inclusion of details of troop movement and the overall objective. In an ephemeral sense, the plans invoked a certain amount of certainty on the part of the army leadership. Napoleon said that he rarely doubted the decision taken by the planning staff.¹⁷ This strict reliance on the principal objective decided during the planning process is the absolute key to the entire Napoleonic conception of objective. A strong objective allowed the military force to maintain a sharp focus throughout the campaign, allowing for a stronger result in the end.

The importance of a strong objective, as briefly noted above, should not be underestimated. Napoleon believed that adherence to an overriding goal could help bring the nation closer together while driving its enemies farther away. In fact, he felt that the use of a good objective by his Imperial Armies represented the first time that such a

¹⁵ David G. Chandler, ed., *The Military Maxims of Napoleon*, trans. Sir George C. D'Aguilar, (London, 1987), II, 55.

¹⁶ Barnow, *Maxims*, II, 5-6.

¹⁷ Capitaine Maurice Gagneur, *Napoléon d'après le Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène*, (Paris, 1921), 189.

method had led to a state's continued existence.¹⁸ In simpler terms, France had been saved by the strength of its convictions and an ironclad military objective. Although Napoleon may have overstated his case, the implication was clear: good objectives win wars.

Napoleon was scornful of the effects of continuing to debate objectives throughout the course of the campaign. He wanted an objective determined long before the beginning of the campaign, with only the means of achieving this objective open to further change. "The effect of ... calling councils of war ... will end in the adoption of the most pusillanimous ... mesures ... True wisdom, so far as a general is concerned, consists in energetic determination."¹⁹ In short, he despised the inadequate goals and procedures that arose from a discussion of a general with his subordinates.²⁰ He felt that it was the role of the general to determine and continue on a path to ultimate completion of an objective. *Le petit caporal*, as his men knew him, also disliked a general that constantly changed his mind. He did not want a leader to lose focus, especially on the day preceding a battle.²¹ The night could lead to great changes on the part of the enemy; in other words, the general should adhere to the objective he had previously so "energetically determined." The importance of Napoleon's ideas in this area is clear. His compilation of maxims and some ideas from previous theorists helped form the basis for

¹⁸ Comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, *Souvenirs de Napoléon I*, 6th ed., (Paris, 1894), 94.

¹⁹ Barnow, *Maxims*, LXV, 54-5.

²⁰ However, one notable exception does exist. Napoleon called a counsel of war during the battle of Marengo, as his forces had nearly been beaten by the Austrian attacks. He allowed his primary subordinates, including Desaix and the younger Kellermann, to give their inputs. He accepted their counsel, and the French emerged victorious, at the expense of Desaix's life.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

the modern-day principles of war. Charles De Gaulle gladly accepted this rich inheritance, applying it skillfully in his own writings. His continuation of the Napoleonic principles illustrated clearly Napoleon's importance in the spectrum of military theory.

Although De Gaulle readily admitted his debt to Napoleon in terms of military theory, he did not simply copy the great general. Instead, he attempted to restate the Napoleonic principles and ideals of war in his own terms, giving them a modern flavor. He laid out a number of basic ideas inherent to the creation of a strong objective for a nation. First, a people (hence its army) had to have a huge determination to succeed. Next, these soldiers had to be willing to die simply for an ideal. Lastly, the military hierarchy had to make a realistic assessment of all the factors that made the nation stronger (or weaker) than its opponent.²² Adherence to these principles could not but help a nation in its effort to create and fulfill an objective. These ideas also sound suspiciously like those of Napoleon, advocating the same basic concepts. This comparison especially holds true when considering De Gaulle's last point, stressing the importance of planning. Napoleon made many similar statements, calling for an exhaustive plan before any campaign was undertaken.

De Gaulle included several possible objectives that had been utilized by Napoleon, although he had not written of them as part of his military theory.²³ First, he recognized the possible use of an army as an instrument of securing economic interests

²² David Schoenbrun, *The Three Lives of Charles De Gaulle*, (New York, 1966), 47.

²³ Napoleon employed the French Army in Holland, Switzerland and other areas in an effort to secure their resources for France. The French annexation of the Rhineland is a prime example of this effort.

and security.²⁴ However, Napoleon also saw the possible usefulness of this idea, although he did not include it in his writings. His advocacy of the ultimately unsuccessful Continental System against the British Empire showed that he understood the possible effects of economics on a military power. He adhered strongly to the objective of strangling his opponent economically, although some of his satellite states and allies did not.

On a completely different subject, De Gaulle did not stop his brilliant analysis at simply economic motivations. He also considered deterrence as a possible objective.²⁵ Basically, he conceived of the deployment of a military force only as an effort to stop the enemy's deployment of a similar force. This idea tied in closely with Napoleon's use of the military to achieve politico-military aims. Not until the creation of the huge alliance system of World War I and its aftermath did states begin to employ immense armies within their own borders in an effort to frighten off possible aggressors.

De Gaulle, inevitably given his Napoleonic heritage, heavily considered political motivations in the formation of objectives. Having witnessed the lethargy of the French Third Republic, De Gaulle wanted a strong public person willing to take the plunge and direct the formation of objectives, especially political goals.²⁶ The achievement and formation of politically based objectives needed to start in the hands of a strong political

²⁴ De Gaulle, *Army*, 83-4.

²⁵ Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle: The Rebel, 1890-1944*, trans. Patrick O'Brien, (New York, 1990), 134. Napoleon also utilized this technique, although in a slightly different method. He created the buffer states of Westphalia, as well as the Batavian and Helvetian Republics, stocking them with strong armies. These states served not only as economic resources, but also as walls against foreign aggression.

²⁶ De Gaulle to Paul Reynaud, 29 March 1935, *Lettres, Notes et Carnets*, II, (Paris, 1980), 384.

leader. Clausewitz, the nineteenth century interpreter of Napoleon, most famously stated the necessity of the use of the military for the achievement of political goals. De Gaulle followed much the same line, as he clearly believed in the use of an army for the achievement of political and/or diplomatic objectives.²⁷ Much like Napoleon's emphasis on the importance of Westphalia and Holland, De Gaulle incorporated a geopolitical worldview into his theory. He clearly, at least unconsciously, made use of the Napoleonic legacy in his writings on the political objectives for the military.

Along the same lines, De Gaulle envisioned another, related, objective for military forces. He conceived of an army used as peacekeepers and for the maintenance of order both domestically and in foreign lands.²⁸ He viewed this requirement in a number of ways. Of course, the force had to have a strong, clearly defined objective before entering into these difficult missions. The nature of peacekeeping was ill defined, so he felt that clearly delineated parameters needed to be set. He wrote to Paul Reynaud on 28 June 1935, stating, "From the beginning of time ... the army has had ... the role and the need of concentrating on the maintenance of order."²⁹ De Gaulle envisioned an army with a number of different possible objectives: the aforementioned economic, deterrent and political as well as the maintenance of order. Although difficult to define, De Gaulle felt that a clear objective would help dissipate any uncertainty from the use of troops. On the other hand, De Gaulle also viewed this possible objective as a state

²⁷ De Gaulle, *Army*, 81-2.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁹ De Gaulle to Reynaud, 28 June 1935, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 393. The author did all translations of De Gaulle's letters unless otherwise noted. France, under Napoleon and immediately after, maintained peacekeeping forces in Berlin and several other German cities. Some of these cities even remained occupied by French forces after Napoleon's fall.

function. In other words, he felt that a nation had the duty of maintaining and helping to create peace.³⁰ Although the nation and its military had the responsibility of utilizing a strong objective, these ideas did not emerge from a vacuum. Rather, they were created in the minds of a planning staff and the leader. A firm objective and thorough planning were keys to military success.

Much like his great predecessor, Napoleon, De Gaulle emphasized the importance of strong planning to the achievement of an objective. Speaking as a military leader, he claimed that political and military leaders, as noted above, must agree on the objective for it to be ultimately successful.³¹ The planning, on the other hand, could not stop at simply a quick view of domestic capabilities. An agreement on the part of the political-military complex would not serve to win a war. Rather, further planning must be undertaken. Of course, throughout the process, the final objective, be it economic or political, must be kept in view. The objective could only be achieved if the enemy's goals were kept in view.³² Once again, De Gaulle drew from Napoleon in this area. Just as the Emperor stressed an overwhelming appraisal of enemy capabilities and intentions, De Gaulle called for a survey of enemy objectives. The evaluation of all circumstances surrounding a possible military event had to play a part in the creation of an objective. A planner that ignored the benefits of an all-around evaluation did so at his peril.

De Gaulle, conversely, did not overstate the importance of fixity in decision-making. He agreed with Napoleon's idea of flexibility. The General wanted to allow

³⁰ Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, 133.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

³² *Ibid.*, 15.

subordinate commanders, not to mention himself, the opportunity to change tactical and operational arrangements.³³ However, this tactical flexibility could not be allowed to negatively affect the achievement of the ultimate objective. This objective must always be kept in the front of the commander's mind, as he needed it to ensure that he properly applied the other principles of war. The best example of De Gaulle's adherence to this Napoleonic idea was found in his relationship with Pétain and other French planners in the inter-war period. He disliked the "wait and see" attitude of the Marshal, characterized by the *a priori* school of land evaluation.³⁴ Not only did De Gaulle dislike this insistence on too much planning, he also disagreed with the unclear objectives advocated by this school of thought. He wanted a clear objective, achieved by quick movement and a surgical strike against the enemy. Once again, his ideas on war closely mirrored those of Napoleon.

De Gaulle continued his tirade against these methods in gentler terms. He wished that "due respect be paid to the principles involved, but that done, those responsible for the fighting should be let free."³⁵ Simply, De Gaulle wanted the leadership to discuss the final objective. However, as soon as the determination was made the command of the armies should fall only to the military leaders. Above all else, De Gaulle wanted to avoid the problems of his contemporaries: their unwillingness to compromise and their reliance

³³ De Gaulle, *Army*, 76.

³⁴ Philippe Barrès, *Charles De Gaulle*, (New York, 1941), 22; Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, 67. The French school of fighting in the years after World War I was marked by Pétain's insistence on trench warfare as a new paradigm, with superior firepower as the key to victory. Thus, an evaluation of terrain before battle would automatically lead the commanding officer to a conclusion as to the method of fighting. For a more complete description of Pétain and his ideas, see Jean Raymond Tournoux, *Sons of France: Pétain and De Gaulle*, (New York, 1966).

³⁵ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 115.

on a system. He wished to avoid intellectual inflexibility and “strategical paralysis.”³⁶

The necessity of strong planning and some tactical flexibility progresses logically into the importance of a strong objective. De Gaulle wrote on this importance, just as Napoleon.

The General often preferred to illustrate his points in his writings with historical examples. He helped to give the reader a more clear sense of his point by appealing to ideas held in common. For instance, in commenting on the importance of an objective, he stated, “The desire for the Rhine, inherited from the Gauls, helped a great deal in the formation and maintenance of French unity.”³⁷ Basically, De Gaulle asserted that a common goal, held by many people over centuries, helped to pull them together in the face of hostility from abroad. Only this clear objective could create such unity in a disparate group of feudal groups through the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, when Francis I finally united France in a political sense. Without this overarching objective, the Rhine, De Gaulle feels these undertakings would have failed miserably.

General De Gaulle also pointed to the importance of a strong, clear objective from the standpoint of a leader. A strong leader must create a strong objective if he wished to attain ultimate success. This idea sounded much like Napoleon’s thoughts on the need for a decisive leader. Indeed, De Gaulle pointed out the necessity of a strong leader in a war, for without him the objective slowly faded into obscurity.³⁸ A strong leader could not help but make this objective clearer in the eyes of his men and his planning staff. If the objective was kept in view, the operation could be planned effectively and ultimate

³⁶ Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, 67.

³⁷ De Gaulle, *Army*, 80.

³⁸ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 104.

success was made more probable. However, the lack of a strong leader or objective could not help but lead to ruin. "Nothing tends more surely to provoke interference from above than a lack of assurance below."³⁹ Taken in context, this statement refers to the interference by uninformed political leaders in the affairs of a weak military leader. A strong military leader that worked with the civilian authorities in constructing a strong objective had no fear of future interference. Instead, he had set himself on the path to success. De Gaulle's continued insistence on a strong objective leads an historical scholar to an inevitable conclusion: he drew many of his ideas from Napoleon Bonaparte. The Emperor proclaimed the importance of many of the same ideas as his brilliant descendant.

Napoleon's military system and ideas revolutionized warfare and helped to change the face of Europe. The sweeping changes wrought by his military machine continue to be felt to the present day, especially in military theory. His immediate successors, Clausewitz and Jomini, attempted to interpret his life and works. However, no single man can possibly do justice to the many ideas and theories of the French Emperor. His importance has continued into the person of Charles De Gaulle, another great French leader that rescued his nation from the brink of disintegration. Through all the trials and tribulations, both men kept one idea in mind – the survival and glory of France.

³⁹ Ibid., 108.

CHAPTER 3

UNITY OF COMMAND

The value of a unified command structure was not lost on either Napoleon or Charles De Gaulle. Rather, both men proclaimed the need for control embodied in the person of one man. The principle of unity of command states simply that an army should have a centralized command that makes strategic decisions for the entire force. In so doing, the army ensures a unity of effort. The importance of this particular principle of war should not be minimized. An army with many commanders is pulled in many directions at one time; consequently, it cannot achieve success through concerted effort. Both Napoleon and De Gaulle stressed the need for this unity. Each man outlined the necessity for this centralization, as well as providing a method to construct this unified structure. De Gaulle provided a summary of his view when he wrote that, “the value of the fighting man is in exact proportion to the value, in terms of personality, of those under whose command he serves.”¹ In other words, the quality of the army depended entirely on the ability of the army’s leader. De Gaulle presupposed the need for a unified command in this statement. He felt that the presence of a single authority was axiomatic in the military art, an unqualified necessity. Napoleon agreed, saying, “The accord

¹ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 30.

between the army leaders and me is a question of life or death for the country.”² The Emperor clearly realized the huge importance of this unity in the formation and employment of his army. The principle, however, also required a certain type of leader to make the proper decisions. De Gaulle and Napoleon both had views on the makeup of an ideal leader of a large army or mass of troops. These ideas must necessarily be included in any discussion of the Napoleonic principles of war. A look at the views of both men on the unity of command begins best with a study of Napoleon’s ideas.

Historians have written volumes on the early life of Napoleon and the influences on the future general and Emperor of France. His military education is often cited as among the best in Europe for the time period. As a result of this education, he often used history to buttress his arguments. He felt so strongly about the need for a unity of command, he felt that a look at Gustavus Adolphus, Turenne, Frederick the Great, Alexander the Great, Hannibal and Caesar was necessary.³ Their armies performed great deeds simply because of their presence. Napoleon’s excellent background in the military arts and sciences led him to form a number of conclusions regarding a number of strong principles. He decided at an early age that a military force must work together in order to succeed.⁴ Of course, Napoleon enjoyed making broad proclamations about the state of warfare and the ideas that he gleaned from years of experience. He learned, from his military education and his experience as a leader of men, that “an army is nothing without

² Général Pierron, *Napoléon de Dresde à Leipzig: Étude Stratégique*, (Paris, 1891), 30.

³ Chandler, *Maxims*, LXXVII, 82.

⁴ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 157.

its head.”⁵ This statement, written to General Clarke in June of 1809, shows clearly the general direction of Napoleon’s ideas on unity of command. A more in-depth look requires a glance at the factors necessitating the unity of command.

Napoleon saw the need for a cohesive army united under one single leader in a campaign against a foreign enemy. He feared disunion in the ranks and the subsequent problems during battle. “Nothing is more important in war than unity in the command; thus when there is war against but one power there should be but one army, acting on one line, and led by one chief.”⁶ At the same time, this unity of effort required a strong commander. The difficulties inevitably confronted by a commander, Carl von Clausewitz’s “fog and friction” of war, could not be dealt with simply. An army divided in its command could not adequately confront these problems. Instead, it would dissolve and disappear from the inside out. Only the commander, in a strong position of authority, could contain these obstacles. “There are certain things in war, of which the commander alone comprehends the importance. Nothing but his superior firmness and ability can subdue and surmount all difficulties.”⁷ Clearly, Napoleon saw the importance of a single leader presiding over all the affairs of his army. At the same time, Napoleon had a vision of the greatest commander for a force to be united under.

In fact, he envisioned himself as the perfect commander. He could not imagine a better leader than himself, and he actually disliked attempts by lower officers to exert

⁵ Napoleon to Clarke, 11 June 1809, Napoleon I, Emperor of the French, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier, publiée par ordre de l’Empereur Napoléon III*, (Paris, 1858-1869), No. 15332, XIX, 112 (herewith *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*).

⁶ Henry, *Maxims*, LXIV, 35.

⁷ Barnow, *Maxims*, LXVI, 55.

their influence, calling it the “most insupportable tyranny.”⁸ Thus, his desire for unity of command in the army may have been motivated somewhat by selfish concerns. He could ensure the continuance of his own dominant role at the top of the military hierarchy by the promulgation of a military principle. Part of his ability to maintain unity of command was his own personal magnetism, clearly in evidence during the Hundred Days.⁹ However, this same desire to keep everything united under his watchful eye was simply an example of the efficiency of a unity in command. France and its armies experienced remarkable success during the period of Napoleon’s reign. In fact, Napoleon’s maintenance of all power under his individual control may have been one of the greatest causes of his success.¹⁰ Unfortunately for the Empire, this idea led to major problems in future years. Napoleon could not always be on hand as his armies fought from one end of the continent to the other. He was present only once in Spain; consequently, his armies suffered a series of defeats that drained the Empire dry. He simply could not be certain of the quality of the command under which his armies would be united.

The Emperor grew increasingly fatigued with the actions of his marshals as the years and wars dragged on interminably. The leaders of his great military machine had grown tired of war and command; they no longer performed with enough skill to justify an army unified under their command.¹¹ In Napoleon’s view, the principle of unity of

⁸ Comte Emmanuel de Las Cases, *Maximes et Pensées du Prisonnier de Sainte-Hélène*, (Paris, 1820), 80.

⁹ Dodge, *Napoleon*, IV, 682-3.

¹⁰ Ibid., 693.

¹¹ Las Cases, *Mémorial*, II (part 4), 20.

command relied entirely on the commander. The entire weight of the battle was placed on his shoulders; it became his struggle to win or lose.¹² The quality of the man commanding decided the results of the battles in which his force was engaged. During the Italian Campaign, Napoleon rebelled at word that the Directory planned to split his command with General François Kellermann, the so-called “Victor of Valmy.” He wrote to Carnot that he would not “voluntarily serve with a man that believes himself to be the first General of Europe,” fearing that combining he and Kellerman was simply “asking to lose everything.”¹³ It is apparent from this letter that Napoleon valued the principle of unity of command on its merits. However, he also clearly had no respect for the abilities of Kellermann, a general that had done little to earn his lofty status.

A brilliant commander, on the other hand, could make his army the envy of Europe. As all the forces of the nation were combined under one strong hand, the army could function properly. In Napoleon’s mind, “A good general ... makes good troops.”¹⁴ Thus, a strong commander could exert his will on his men to help mold them into a good fighting force. Napoleon’s marshals and generals controlled drill, deployment and strategic maneuver. By combining all of these tasks and all forces under one commander, the army had a greater chance of success, assuming a skillful commander.

Unable to escape his eighteenth century roots, Napoleon did believe in the necessity of security of communications. He often used a threat to his opponent’s line of communications as a means of forcing a retreat. He knew that his army could not

¹² Las Cases, *Mémorial*, I (part 2), 9.

¹³ Napoleon to Carnot, 14 May 1796, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 421, I, 336.

¹⁴ Barnow, *Maxims*, LVI, 46.

function properly if the communication system did not work properly. The strength of communications made a strong case for the necessity of a unified command structure. He warned that “it is contrary to all true principle to make corps which have no communication act separately against a central force whose communications are open.”¹⁵ He saw the necessity for a strong command structure in battle, as a force disunited simply could not stand against a united force. A force with open lines of communication, relying on the strength of the central leader, could easily defeat its opponent.

Napoleon spoke clearly on this point in a letter to General Clarke on 11 June 1809:

Si l’armée n’est différemment dirigée, ils la conduiront avant peu de mois à une catastrophe. Il ne faut donc pas agir sur tous les points de la circonférence quand on n’a pas de communication; mais il faut former un gros corps contre les Anglais, ne pas les laisser respirer et tomber dessus du moment qu’ils se désuniraient.¹⁶

The Emperor could not help but see the importance of command centralized in his hands. The army, spread over a large distance, could not emerge victorious without his influence in all decision making. This need required secure lines of communication.

Much like Napoleon described the importance of a unity in command, he also recommended the ideal structure for its implementation. Of course, he sat at the top of the hierarchical pyramid. He gave orders, expecting his subordinates to follow them exactly as given.¹⁷ At the same time, he kept a watchful eye over the execution of these

¹⁵ Chandler, *Maxims*, XXVI, 63.

¹⁶ Napoleon to Clarke, 11 June 1809, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 15332, XIX, 112. “If the army is not directed differently, they will drive it within a few months into a catastrophe. It doesn’t make sense to act on all the points of a circle when we can’t communicate; nevertheless, we must form a large corps against the English, prevent them from breathing, and fall upon them at the moment that they become disunited.”

¹⁷ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 375.

orders and the performance of his staff. He divided his army staff into three primary units: his personal staff or *la maison*, the General Staff of the Grand Army (under Marshal Alexandre Berthier), and the General Commissary of Army Stores.¹⁸ At times, he simply did not trust his staff to adequately perform their assigned duties. He knew the difficulty of marching troops under combat conditions. Although his staff system was designed to avoid difficulties, he observed everything, maintaining his command over every aspect.¹⁹

However, this command was not taken to extremes. He did not insist on deciding every detail. Theodore Dodge describes this willingness to shirk some menial tasks as necessary, as minutiae leads to inefficiency, slowness and misinformed decisions.²⁰ Napoleon had enough faith in his marshals, especially early in his career, to allow them some latitude in execution. Each marshal was the commander of a corps; these units were unified under a single commander. Napoleon deigned getting his hands dirty in the tactical decisions of his trusted military subordinates. "I almost never gave detailed instructions to my generals; I ordered them to conquer."²¹ The ability of a single, strong commander was absolutely the most important element in the construction of a good hierarchy. A good commander could overcome difficulties and obstacles. In a letter to Lazare Carnot, Napoleon expounded on the problems of having a divided command, even a command that included two good commanders. He felt that, "it is better to have one

¹⁸ Ibid., 368.

¹⁹ J. Colin, *L'Éducation Militaire de Napoléon*, (Paris, 1900), 362.

²⁰ Dodge, *Napoleon*, 693.

²¹ Las Cases, *Maximes*, 58.

bad general than two good ones.”²² Napoleon’s conceptions of the role of the leader and the necessity for a unified command structure did not perish with his death on St. Helena. On the contrary, his conception of unity of command continued to live on in the person of Charles De Gaulle.

General De Gaulle, also known as the Constable or Big Asparagus, actually acknowledged his debt to the former Emperor of France. He cited Napoleon as the ultimate example of a unified command. He stated that Napoleon’s knowledge, understanding and command of his army played a huge role in his planning and ultimate success.²³ The one-time protégé of Marshal Philippe Pétain readily admitted the overall importance of a unified command, for a variety of reasons. He saw the social value of this unity, an aspect disregarded by Napoleon simply because he dominated every aspect of French life. At the same time, De Gaulle saw that warfare itself required a strong leader to carry the burden of command, to exert his will on battle. Finally, the efficiency of an army that worked under a single commander was much greater than that of a unit with a divided command.

A strong commander was an absolute necessity in a Gallist military force. All the forces had to be placed under one strong person, a leader that could exert force on the government and the military, much like the influence of Napoleon, even before his coronation. This strong leader could subsequently place the military in a strong position in society.²⁴ A military divided among several different leaders would be unable to exert

²² Napoleon to Carnot, 14 May 1796, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 421, I, 336.

²³ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 19.

²⁴ De Gaulle, *Army*, 177.

influence. In De Gaulle's mind, the military was responsible, at least in part, for creating and maintaining public confidence. This goal was simply unattainable without a monolithic military figure atop the hierarchy. In a letter to a friend, Lucien Nachin, De Gaulle wrote of the need for a "Louvois" to help rescue the Third Republic.²⁵ The unity of command under a great military leader – like Napoleon or Louvois – could place the military in a more powerful position in the socio-political spectrum in France. However, this command brought with it a certain responsibility. The leader had to have a certain moral make-up; after all, the entire decision-making process rested on his shoulders.²⁶ In other words, the leader of a large force, with all command unified under his direction, must make rational, informed, moral decisions.

The leader must be decisive. He could not wait for an in-depth investigation of the problem; rather, he had to make a snap judgment, passing his ideas down the hierarchical structure to the lowest levels for implementation. The rapidity of warfare required a single leader to make these rapid, intelligent decisions.²⁷ A group of leaders attempting to make such decisions could not help but fall into a cycle of argument and debate. In so doing, they would delay the process, leading to difficulties and possibly defeat against a better-organized opponent. This same man of ability, possessing the reins, could drive his country to new heights. "The double role [political and military] played by one man of genius has often imparted a special vigor to the activities of

²⁵ Brian Crozier, *De Gaulle*, (New York, 1973), 50.

²⁶ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 26.

²⁷ De Gaulle, *Army*, 162.

generalship; but it has also brought about cruel reverses.”²⁸ De Gaulle felt simply that one special person could succeed by controlling all aspects of the government and the military. However, any excess on the part of the leader would lead to his downfall. The principle of unity of command, much like the ideas of Napoleon, required restraint by the leader. He could not allow his individual power to overcome the sense of duty to army and nation; in the end, he could be the deciding factor in victory or defeat.

The concentration of power in one place also helped in a more general sense. This unity would help fulfill another principle of war – economy of force. A unified command allowed for better efficiency in a bureaucratic and hierarchical sense.²⁹ A single commander could coordinate and plan without the interference of others. The orders, instead of coming from disparate directions, emanated from one source, the commander-in-chief. This principle allows individual soldiers to execute their orders, knowing the ultimate responsibility for the outcome of battle rests with a single, exalted commander. De Gaulle saw the violation of this principle firsthand when he took command of the 4th Armored Division in Lorraine on 11 May 1939. The scattering of this division cost De Gaulle time and cohesion among his troops.³⁰ The loss of these vital factors, the camaraderie of his men and the time for preparation, cost the French in the fight with the Germans. The Panzer divisions raced across France, laying waste to the countryside. A unified command, placed under one man, would have avoided at least some of these difficulties. This single command structure could have made decisions for

²⁸ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 110.

²⁹ Conférences prononcées à l'École de Guerre, 1925, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 253.

³⁰ Schoenbrun, *The Three Lives of Charles De Gaulle*, 64.

the units across the frontiers of France, stopping the individualistic warfare waged by the local commanders. In addition, the units would have been better concentrated in battle, owing to the rapid decisions made by the commanding authority.

De Gaulle's theory of war also included a means of implementing this unified command. He had a specific set of parameters into which the command had to fall. Anything outside of these parameters was simply too much, asking for trouble. He held Napoleon's system in great esteem, although he did not necessarily subjugate himself to the Napoleonic ideal. He often quoted René Quintan's *Maxims on War*, saying that "The hero does not want to be the first, but the only one."³¹ De Gaulle held Napoleon as the ultimate example of this "hero," the man that could unify command effectively.

However, De Gaulle did not adopt Napoleon's ideas of a total unification of state and military apparatus. Instead, he advocated the modern conception of civil control of the military.³² In this regard, De Gaulle stood as a product of his times. He was reared in the tradition of liberty founded by the French and American Revolutions. The General witnessed the effectiveness of these popular democracies, merely suggestions in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. He saw the division of power with civilian control of the military. Napoleon, on the other hand, was born under the Ancien Régime and later served under the oppressive reigns of the Committee of Public Safety and the Directory. He saw power centralized in one man as the only means of finding security.

³¹ Crozier, *De Gaulle*, 55.

³² De Gaulle, *Sword*, 97.

Conversely, De Gaulle did not feel that the civil authority should intervene in military affairs.³³ The authority of the man in charge of the military should be nearly equal in weight to the civil authority. These two leaders, in order to run the nation smoothly, must agree fundamentally on most issues. Thus, a new unity of command was reached in this symbiotic relationship between two leaders. This cohesion came with one exception: the military leader must take control in times of crisis. Of course, he should still coordinate actions with the civilian authorities, trying to maintain public confidence while striving for victory in conflict.³⁴ Without a doubt, the combination of powers into one single person carried with it a number of risks.

De Gaulle had no doubt that a soldier with too much power stood as a huge risk to the liberty of the people. He did not advocate unity of command above all else; instead, he felt that the soldier must guard against the desire to control everything.³⁵ The unity of command discussed by De Gaulle, naturally, dwelt primarily with military matters. He did not truly want to see any nation dominated by its military, as that was necessitated only by emergency. He did not want the command structure to be excessively interventionist, at pain of losing “its prestige little by little.”³⁶ Much like Napoleon’s axioms, De Gaulle stressed that command could only go so far. At some point, the subordinate commanders had to take control of minute details. Unity of command as a principle was created primarily to increase the strength of a unit in battle.

³³ Ibid., 100.

³⁴ Ibid., 103. See also Crozier’s discussion of De Gaulle’s conception of leadership, probably the best single view of De Gaulle’s views on the political/military synthesis.

³⁵ Ibid., 106.

³⁶ De Gaulle, *Army*, 172.

The General viewed the primary role of the unified commander as that of a synthesizer. He wanted a leader to give the “point of application” or objective to his subordinates, letting them perform in the tactical realm.³⁷ This idea can be traced directly to the ideas of Napoleon, as often enumerated in his writings. Jay Luvaas, a prominent writer on Napoleonic military theory, reported Napoleon’s views on strategic interaction. “Hold no council of war, but accept the views of each, one by one ... the secret is to make each alike ... believe that he has your confidence.”³⁸ The two military leaders believed that the unity of command could extend only to the strategic level. The unified commander could accept the views of his subordinates, keeping them satisfied with the level of input while still making a single, informed decision.

De Gaulle provided perhaps the best general idea on the unity of command. He wanted a professional army led by “masters” in complete control of military affairs.³⁹ The importance of the unity of command simply could not be avoided. An army divided among its commanders could not hope to emerge victorious in the long run. A single authority, or master, in complete control of the military could direct affairs to a level satisfactory to create success. Without a doubt, this principle brought with it a requirement for a leader, a person that could lead the troops to ultimate victory through the force of his personality.

³⁷ Conférences prononcées à l’École de Guerre, 1925, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 222.

³⁸ Jay Luvaas, “Napoleon on the Art of Command,” *Consortium on Revolutionary Europe Proceedings*, 1984; 289. As noted above, Napoleon’s use of councils of war is represented best at the Battle of Marengo, at which he incorporated the counsel of his generals into the plan of attack.

³⁹ Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, 155.

The management and control of a force composed of many diverse groups, perhaps spread over a large front, was extremely difficult. Thus, a special type of leadership was necessary in order to make the forces work together towards the common goal of victory. Napoleon certainly had some thoughts on the ideal leader in such a situation. He felt that a military commander must possess that elusive ability to recognize factors on the battlefield and act accordingly. He called this ability the *coup d'oeil*, and said that it was integral to success in war.⁴⁰ A battle simply could not be won without a good leader. The excitement and confusion were enough to hurt any man's chances of success; however, the added problem of coordination between the different arms of a Napoleonic force made good leadership nearly impossible. In essence, Napoleon felt that a good leader was not made, but rather was born. He was born with the ability to rapidly and accurately assess a situation and the knowledge of the proper moment to order the decisive attack.⁴¹ This innate ability was not common, and it could not be created artificially. It took a special breed of commander to know the exact moment to stop the artillery barrage, send in the infantry, and break the enemy at the perfect location and time with cavalry. Napoleon recognized the immense difficulty in this area, and endeavored to find the source of the problem; he pointed to the leader.

Indeed, Napoleon himself has been hailed as a great example of a military leader. He clearly possessed many qualities that enabled him to win victory after victory in Europe against every force placed in his path. De Gaulle himself holds up Napoleon as the ultimate illustration of the effectiveness of imperturbability, the ability to remain calm

⁴⁰ Las Cases, *Souvenirs*, 114.

⁴¹ Holtman, *Revolution*, 49.

under intense pressure.⁴² Napoleon, not to mention Marshal André Masséna, was a perfect example for his men; he showed them the proper comportment when faced by daunting circumstances. The Emperor indicated his belief in the necessity of a calm, cool-headed general in his own discussions on leadership. He felt that a great leader could not be rattled by circumstances; rather, he listened only to himself.⁴³ The ability to coolly and dispassionately overlook external stimuli in an effort to calmly focus on the problem could not be overlooked in importance. He could not allow himself to be swayed by personal feelings or compassion for another soldier or person under his command.⁴⁴ The application of principles of war required ruthless leadership. The leader must act only in a manner that would lead to ultimate victory. The soldiers under his command, despite protestations to the contrary, were only tools in his hand. He must wield these tools with wisdom, conserving and applying them appropriately.

On the other hand, leadership could not be viewed entirely from a dispassionate perspective. The common soldier could be made to fight more effectively if he believed in the cause for which he was fighting. The leader played a huge role in the effort to motivate soldiers. Once again, De Gaulle pointed to Napoleon as a great example of a general that possessed the ability to inspire his troops. He accomplished this feat largely through personal appearances among the soldiers, instilling in them a sense of pride and honor for serving in his army.⁴⁵ The affection and respect of the common soldier is also

⁴² De Gaulle, *Sword*, 57.

⁴³ Las Cases, *Maximes*, 29.

⁴⁴ Chandler, *Maxims*, LXXIII, 80.

⁴⁵ De Gaulle, *Army*, 159.

critical in making him fight. Napoleon's magnetic hold on his troops allowed him to wield them as a weapon like none seen before in Europe. He saw that the obedience of a soldier was directly tied to the respect and admiration he held for his commander.⁴⁶ The men, while perhaps not believing in the necessity of a war, believed in the necessity of following their commander. Napoleon could command them only because they respected his authority and ability. At the same time, Bonaparte played to their vanity. He created military awards, high rates of promotion and endowed a general esprit de corps to his troops.⁴⁷ He effectively managed a diverse force, spread out across miles, through the exercise of his authority. A simple sense of camaraderie and a pervading spirit enabled the Napoleonic armies to fight and win many battles.

Although Napoleon clearly carried concern for his men, he did not place them on the highest priority. He recognized that the ultimate goal of a military force, especially one designed so ruthlessly for killing as his combined arms, must have a mission. This mission must be placed above the interests of men in determining the proper course of leadership.⁴⁸ The mission could not fall behind the men in advancing the army. He could not over emphasize the goodwill and genuine friendship of his men. After gaining their respect the leader had to sublimate his soldiers; he could not succeed without unscrupulous determination.⁴⁹ This skill was especially important in managing a combined force, made up of far-flung elements with their own commanders. Indeed, the

⁴⁶ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 155.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Chandler, *Maxims*, XV, 60.

⁴⁹ Las Cases, *Maximes*, 104.

commander had to keep himself separate from the personal concerns of his men lest he hesitate in sending a man to his death in battle.

The final, and perhaps most important tenet of Napoleonic leadership lay in character. A leader without character simply did not stand a chance in warfare. Napoleon took a logical approach in his presentation of character as an important aspect. He wrote that “the ability to think may be attributed to the soul; the more reason acquires perfection, the more the soul is perfect, and the more a man is morally responsible for his actions.”⁵⁰ A leader in a Napoleonic army was clearly expected to be rational. Consequently, if this rationality flowed from his soul, this same leader must also possess some character. The greater his ability to think rationally and lead men, the greater his character. The historical scholar once again sees Napoleon’s belief in certain innate abilities of great men. A great leader must in essence be born with character. A product of his times, Napoleon felt the stirrings of the romantic soul in Europe. He believed in the more positive side of life. De Gaulle, born in an age of agnosticism and reason, expressed many of his ideas on leadership in slightly different terms. However, the basic ideas remained the same, as they were descended from Napoleon.

Of course, De Gaulle did not conceive of his theories on leadership after speaking with Napoleon. Rather, intervening theorists, carrying on the words of Bonaparte, influenced him greatly. Two of the primary Napoleonic tenets, character and the possession of *coup d’oeil* were related by Clausewitz in his discussion of Napoleonic

⁵⁰ Ibid., 60.

leadership.⁵¹ De Gaulle was greatly influenced by the ideas on leadership that he found in his studies. He professed his basic belief in the necessity for a certain type of leadership. He said that the coordination and the driving of a combined force make up the true role of a leader.⁵² He proceeded to break his theory down into a number of component parts. For the most part, his theory on leadership, although perhaps restated in more modern terms, descended almost directly from Bonaparte's ideas and example over a century earlier.

De Gaulle felt that the speed and complexity of a blitzkrieg action, the exact type of operation proposed first by Napoleon and later by the General himself, required a leader to make immediate decisions.⁵³ Any delay in a battle with so many variables would inevitably lead to failure. Only the proper application of the *coup d'oeil* spoken of so prominently by Napoleon could lead to victory on the battlefield. De Gaulle actually considered this innate ability the first necessity in any military leader.⁵⁴ Above all else, De Gaulle wanted the leader to make the coordination of forces on the field easier. He felt that "an intelligent appreciation [of circumstances] can introduce some degree of [accuracy] into much that is uncertain."⁵⁵ The battlefield represented a huge challenge to men; it was impossible to control all the circumstances. Thus, the leader must control every aspect of battle possible. He could then gain a greater handle on the uncontrollable

⁵¹ Michael I. Handel, Masters of War: Sun Tzu, Clausewitz and Jomini, (London, 1992), 141-5.

⁵² Conférences prononcées à l'École de Guerre, 1925, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 219.

⁵³ De Gaulle, *Army*, 162.

⁵⁴ Conférences prononcées à l'École de Guerre, 1925, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 222.

⁵⁵ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 18.

aspects of the war. This ability to control the circumstances on the field would allow him to exert his *coup d'oeil* and find victory.

As noted above, De Gaulle held up Napoleon as the greatest example of the proper reaction to stressful situations. The Emperor, like Masséna, never allowed himself to seem bothered by the dizzying array of events swirling around the fight. Instead, he maintained an “impassive attitude.”⁵⁶ His judgment and ability to make decisions were never impaired by the brutality of the carnage going on in front of his eyes. De Gaulle considered this ability absolutely essential, as authority required impartiality and disdain for distraction.

On the other hand, distraction was required, to some extent, to maintain the spirit of the men. De Gaulle even considered a leader’s “grandeur” more important than his virtue.⁵⁷ A leader that gained the respect and admiration of his men, perhaps even leading them to hold him in awe, was more effective. He could assert his authority more effectively if held in high regard by his men. In fact, De Gaulle cited an example from his personal memory of the First World War. He recalled the inefficiency and distance of the general staffs from the front and the common soldier in a diary entry. He concluded that older generals could not maintain the enthusiasm and confidence of their men in the field.⁵⁸ Regardless of age and rank, a leader could not be effective if he could not inspire his men. The fighting force was made up of common soldiers at the lowest level. The force was ineffective if the soldiers were not motivated to fight.

⁵⁶ Conférences prononcées à l’École de Guerre, 1925, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 224.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 215.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 208.

In adherence to Napoleonic principles, De Gaulle tempered the necessity for close contact with troops by adding in the necessity of mission accomplishment. He recognized the need for an emotional distance between the commander and his men. He said that an “empirical realism” is absolutely essential in evaluating actions on the battlefield.⁵⁹ The leader could not allow himself to be concerned with the personal welfare of a certain common soldier. He must employ his army as the indefatigable force that he designed. The army was created to earn a victory in a war against an enemy; consequently, the leader must not allow his own personal feelings to become another foe.

Character also played a prominent role in De Gaulle’s theory. He defined a man of character as a man of principles that refused to compromise. Certainly, the General’s view of this issue changed as he moved into the political realm. Nothing could be accomplished in French politics without compromise. Although De Gaulle stated that virtue was not as important as grandeur, his use of the term virtue must be questioned. A man of virtue was unnecessary in the military, as an overwhelming reliance on truth and proper relations with the enemy could only lead to defeat. All other qualities, according to De Gaulle, were worthless without character.⁶⁰ A leader must have the ability to set aside all other problems and simply follow the principles that he has set down. He could not allow himself to compromise in any way. After all, the rapid nature of warfare with combined arms often required immediate decisions. A man of character should make these decisions, a man with known guidelines already in place.⁶¹ These guidelines would

⁵⁹ Jean Raymond Tournoux, *Sons of France: Pétain and De Gaulle*, trans. Oliver Coburn, (New York, 1966), 71.

⁶⁰ Conférences prononcées à l’École de Guerre, 1925, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 223.

⁶¹ De Gaulle, *Army*, 163.

allow the leader to act almost without thinking, knowing that he was acting properly. The value of such ability in a combined force was immeasurable, as the rapidity and complexity of action preclude any long examination of facts. The leader must act, and act appropriately.

In essence, unity of command stands as an important principle of war. A military force simply cannot achieve success without a firm, united leadership. Both Napoleon and his disciple De Gaulle believed in the need for such a principle. At the same time, the unified commander needed to have a number of personality and leadership traits. Without these traits, the possibility of success greatly decreased for the army. An army without a unified command, without a skilled commander, or both, had almost no chance of success in the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. The principles of war, led by unity of command, help to lay out the guidelines for a successful waging of war.

CHAPTER 4

OFFENSIVE

Military theorists have debated the best method of waging war for centuries. A military pendulum exists, swaying back and forth between the extremes of total defensive and total offensive warfare. Obviously, a force that fights entirely at one extreme or the other has no chance of success; a proper mixture is required. This mixture has served as the primary forum for debate among these military thinkers. However, the strength of the offensive has generally been accepted, and it has been adopted as a principle of war. The adoption of this principle stems largely from the emphasis placed on the attack by Napoleon, as his forces almost never remained in fortified, static positions. For the most part, he despised the defensive, saying, "the best means of defense is attack."¹ The importance of offensive warfare, so clearly established by Napoleonic thinking, also found a place in the theories of Charles De Gaulle, a twentieth-century disciple. The General, even by 1912 (aged only twenty-two), argued effectively for a war of movement and attack.² In fact, the young General Bonaparte clearly displayed the importance of the offensive in his Italian Campaign. As he fought the Austrian forces

¹ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 180.

² Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, 213.

throughout Northern Italy, Bonaparte captured a number of puzzled German officers.

One captain, not knowing Napoleon's identity, exclaimed:

No one seems to understand what they are about: we have been sent to fight a young blockhead, who attacks us on the right and the left, in front and in the rear, so that we know not how to proceed. This mode of carrying on war is intolerable.³

The offensive system of war utilized by Napoleon disconcerted and confused his opponents. Indeed, they resorted to name-calling and criticism in an effort to defend their reputations. Napoleon's style of warfare did not cease to annoy and disturb his opponents as they tried to catch up to his military revolution. Of course, De Gaulle did not spearhead any such revolution. Rather, he merely reasserted the valuable ideas demonstrated by Napoleon during his practice of the art of war. He saw the value of the offensive and initiative by leaders, saying that war "will make possession and initiative the trump card in future conflicts."⁴ The emphasis placed on the offensive by both men is obvious from these statements alone. On the other hand, a more thorough analysis is required to truly observe the lineage from Napoleon to De Gaulle. A view of each man's definition of offensive warfare, followed by an analysis of the means of implementation and the importance of the offense, are required to complete the study. An in-depth study leads to only one conclusion: Napoleon's ideas have been translated directly into De Gaulle's theories.

Napoleon did not doubt the effectiveness of attack and forward movement. Indeed, he felt that the offensive was a direct product of a strong leader unafraid to assert

³ Las Cases, *Mémorial*, I (book 2), 8.

⁴ De Gaulle, *Army*, 133.

his initiative. "How many things apparently impossible have nevertheless been performed by resolute men who had no alternative but death."⁵ In other words, Napoleon felt that a man imbued with initiative and an offensive spirit could not help but achieve his goals. He believed in the weakness of most men (and most military commanders); their betters could overcome such men. Napoleon's reliance on the offensive is best described as total. "The vivacity, the continuity in the offensive that Bonaparte displayed, with which he was constantly preoccupied, is ... the means that made him different from his predecessors."⁶ Napoleon believed that the offensive sprang from an idea held in the head of the general. He could dominate only by utilizing this spirit to push his force forward. He could not be bound by desires to conserve his force. He especially could not be held back by caution, as the general with "the least reserve accomplishes the object."⁷ Thus, as discussed above, the general had to formulate a clear objective. However, he could not achieve this objective without an offensive spirit. He must want to take the risks associated with the achievement of his goal.

This offensive spirit composed a key portion of Napoleonic ideals on war. The general simply could not hesitate to put his troops in action. Any offensive thrust must be motivated, at least in part, by a fighting spirit.⁸ The commander, and consequently his army, must desire victory. A passive attitude only led to excessive caution in battle, which could only cause problems. It could not be a half-hearted effort; the principle of

⁵ Barnow, *Maxims*, LXVII, 56.

⁶ Colin, *L'Éducation Militaire*, 363. The author did all translations of Colin's work unless otherwise mentioned.

⁷ Las Cases, *Mémoires*, 9.

⁸ Colin, *L'Éducation*, 363.

the offensive must include an all-out, controlled attack. Napoleon wrote on this subject, commenting on the usefulness and make-up of an attack as compared to a retreat.

Once the offensive has been assumed, it must be sustained to the last extremity ... a retreat will always weaken the morale of an army ... Besides, retreats cost always more men and matériel than the most bloody engagements, with this difference, that in a battle the enemy's loss is nearly equal to your own, whereas in a retreat the loss is on your side only.⁹

Napoleon clearly spelled out the requirements of offensive warfare in this selection. In addition, he began to outline some reasons for an offensive campaign. These motivations and justifications will be dealt with below. In any case, the effectiveness of the offensive should not be doubted, as Napoleon had a number of field experiences that justified this belief.

Napoleon and his forces, as mentioned briefly above, greatly panicked the Austrian forces in Italy. They had never before seen offensive warfare on the scope of Napoleon's operations; they could not react effectively.¹⁰ The Austrians had never seen such a mobile, deadly whirlwind of a force on a battlefield. Much of this unpredictability actually stemmed from a plan. Napoleon always wanted to maintain battlefield initiative. He expected much the same from his commanders, ordering them to make the first move in many cases, regardless of position or relative strength.¹¹ The great general simply did not doubt the effectiveness of his forces as long as they maintained an initiative of

⁹ Chandler, *Maxims*, VI, 57.

¹⁰ Las Cases, *Mémorial*, 8.

¹¹ Napoleon to Gouvion St. Cyr, 2 September 1805, *Correspondance de Napoleon Ier*, No. 9176, XI, 209.

movement and attack. He believed that the aggressor held an advantage in nearly every military situation.

However, he did agree that some operations required other types of warfare. He felt that some campaigns might include a defensive portion; on the other hand, he did feel that the need for a transition to the offensive would arise, perhaps the most delicate operation in warfare.¹² Obviously, Napoleon did not discount entirely the influence of the defensive on warfare. Much like his successor, De Gaulle, he disliked the idea of an *offensive à outrance*, an all-out attack. Rather, control was also important in any operation, especially an offensive. He wrote, “offensive war does not exclude defense, although its aim is to force the frontier and invade the enemy’s country.”¹³ Clearly, Napoleon felt that he could not wage an offensive war at the expense of all other objectives and strategic necessities. Instead, he stressed that an offensive thrust was required to emerge victorious in any conflict. The other principles of war had to be considered as well; he could not forsake one idea in order to promulgate another.¹⁴ In other words, he had to consider mass, economy of force, objective, unity of command and the other principles of war before ordering an offensive operation. He could not attack at all costs, as that would only place him in a difficult position. He also saw that an offensive could not be maintained with a massive inferiority in number of infantry, artillery and cavalry. Instead, the commanding officer in such a situation needed to

¹² Chandler, *Maxims*, XIX, 62.

¹³ L.E. Henry, *Napoleon’s War Maxims*, (London, 1899), CI, 43.

¹⁴ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 145.

utilize other principles of war, such as economy of force, surprise and maneuver, to defeat his enemy.¹⁵

In general, Napoleon did favor offensive operations. He wanted to place his army on the defensive in only the most extreme of situations, when it was absolutely necessary. His employment of the offensive was generally masterful. The Emperor used the defensive, generally, on only two occasions: large troop inferiority, or an untenable battle position.¹⁶ Napoleon utilized the offensive whenever possible, knowing that initiative was a key to victory in war. Basically, he even felt that a general on the defensive, as a result of one of the above reasons, should still be poised for an attack. He saw the wisdom in waiting if threatened by superior numbers, but as he told his brother Joseph in Naples, he expected his army to be prepared for an offensive operation at any time.¹⁷ Nevertheless, a number of different types of war occasionally caused Napoleon to modify his stance on the offensive. Mountain warfare, irregular due to the strange terrain, caused many problems. Napoleon was well schooled in mountain warfare, as will be recalled from his readings of Bourcet's work on war in the mountains. "The attacking party acts under a disadvantage. Even in offensive war, the merit lies in having only defensive conflicts, and obliging your enemy to become the assailant."¹⁸ The Emperor believed that the narrow mountain passes and uneven ground made an offensive thrust nearly

¹⁵ Barnow, *Maxims*, X, 12.

¹⁶ Dodge, *Napoleon*, IV, 110-11.

¹⁷ Napoleon to Joseph, 8 July 1806, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 10467, XII, 642.

¹⁸ Barnow, *Maxims*, XIV, 15-16.

impossible. The defensive force could protect itself very effectively; indeed, they became almost impregnable.

As a result of these various situations, Napoleon devised a general theory to cover offensive operations and the need for them. He wanted attacks launched only after the establishment of a strong position. Thus, he could rest easy in the knowledge that he had covered all possibilities. This offensive, therefore, incorporated the leader's skill in moving from defensive to offensive operations.¹⁹ This doctrine would enable the French forces to fight effectively from unfavorable positions. They could launch assaults, content in the strong fall-back position available in the event of failure. This offensive thrust could not help but preclude offensive attempts on the part of the enemy, as the opponent would be too busy dealing with threats to his front.²⁰ Along these same lines, Napoleon recognized the possible effectiveness of fortresses. These strong positions, many left over from Vauban's constructions during the reign of Louis XIV, could help support an offensive army or encapsulate a defensive army. Napoleon wanted these strongpoints used as launching pads for attacks. Indeed, they represented the perfect example of his fortified position as a base for offensive operations.²¹

However, the means of implementing offensive warfare did not stop at the use of terrain. Indeed, much of the offensive fell on the shoulders of the commander. He was expected to possess the knowledge and expertise to recognize the proper moment for the seizure of the initiative. "In war there is but one favorable moment: the great thing is to

¹⁹ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 145.

²⁰ Chandler, *Maxims*, XXIII, 63.

²¹ Barnow, *Maxims*, XL, 34. See also Hubert Camon, *La guerre Napoléonienne*. Paris: Chapelet, 1903-10. 5 vol.

seize it.”²² The exact moment for this change, known as the culmination point in the writings of Carl von Clausewitz, was difficult to discern.²³ In effect, the leader had to sense, from the actions of the armies on the field, the weather conditions and his own knowledge of military art and history, the moment for the transition. Napoleon was almost unsurpassed in his ability to recognize this moment.²⁴ He reacted instantly, sending his men forward in a rush that usually decimated the enemy. Napoleon did realize that not all of his Marshals and generals possessed this ability. Thus, the Emperor did not necessarily expect his subordinates to perform up to his ability.

He did, however, expect them to perform with the aforementioned offensive spirit. He refused to accept the possibility of timidity or defeat through inaction. Napoleon apparently had little faith in the ability of Marshal Bertrand Bessièrès’ ability to maintain the offensive. On one occasion, he upbraided the marshal for his tendency, during the Peninsular War, to make retreats, ordering the dispersal of his troops “with no backward movement.”²⁵ Later in the year, he continued his attacks on his marshal’s inability to keep up the attack, fearing that he lacked the necessary spirit. He wrote to Marshal Alexandre Berthier, asking, “Must we abandon Burgos like we abandoned

²² Henry, *Maxims*, XCV, 42.

²³ Clausewitz’s writings have been mentioned previously in this work. His discussion of the culmination point is not particularly easy to understand. Basically, the leader with the aptitude to recognize the changing nature of battle must move from the defensive, the stronger (yet negative) form of warfare to the offensive, the weaker (yet positive) form of warfare. His definition of the conditions relating to this moment is vague. Instead, he relies almost entirely on the singularity of each situation and the individual ability of each leader.

²⁴ Holtman, *Revolution*, 49.

²⁵ Napoleon to Bessièrès, 16 April 1808, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 13751, XVII, 15.

Tudela?”²⁶ The Emperor refused to allow Bessières to take defensive action when not placed in a precarious situation. He accepted no excuse for a refusal or inability to take the offensive. In a letter to his brother Joseph in Naples, Napoleon ordered him to advance on the Anglo-Neapolitan force, accepting “neither cease-fire or surrender.”²⁷ Napoleon did not want Joseph to make any poor decisions in his Neapolitan campaign. Instead, he wanted to exercise direct control, maintaining the offensive at all times. A weak commander like Joseph could not emerge victorious through negotiation and timidity; he had to act with aggression.

Napoleon justified his reliance on the offensive through a number of different means. For instance, he recognized that a good military commander gained his skills through experience. He could not hope to truly understand the art and science of war through the reading of textbooks or attendance at lectures. Consequently, only offensive campaigns could provide this much-needed knowledge. “Make war offensively; it is the sole means to become a great Captain and to fathom the secrets of the art.”²⁸ Thus, a commander could enhance his own abilities while simultaneously increasing his knowledge. The combination of battlefield intelligence and experience could not be surpassed, and could be reached only through the offensive.

Indeed, Napoleon’s overriding goal was to continue the offensive whenever possible. He aimed primarily at an opposing country’s army, since he wanted to end the

²⁶ Napoleon to Berthier, 8 September 1808, *Ibid.*, No. 14307, XVII, 585.

²⁷ Napoleon to Joseph, 19 January 1806, *Ibid.*, No. 9685, XI, 665.

²⁸ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 145.

war with one blow.²⁹ The enemy would be forced to capitulate if its army had been destroyed; it simply could not continue the struggle. Clearly, this total destruction could be wrought only with an aggressive, offensive-minded campaign. As Napoleon lost the ability to act with this offensive acumen, he began to lose the ability to win decisive battles against his enemies. His hesitancy during the battle of Leipzig was due primarily to his defensive position. Consequently, he was unable to exercise his initiative. This inability cost him the opportunity to win the war; in the end, he fell victim to his enemy's superiority of resources and men.³⁰ Moreover, a general simply could not win through timidity. He could not hope to turn back his enemies by luck and a defensive position. The Emperor wrote, "He who wishes to make quite sure of everything in war, and never ventures, will always be at a disadvantage ... Boldness is the acme of wisdom."³¹ In essence, Napoleon stressed the importance of risk-taking and initiative. Without these qualities, an army and its commander were more likely to fail.

Napoleon did not confine himself to these practical discussions of the result of battles fought on the defensive. He also mentioned some more ephemeral concepts, like the honor, character and morale of an army. He felt that an army's honor and confidence would be greatly eroded by a weak commander unable to make the proper decisions at the proper time. The attack was the only method of ensuring the continuation of this French confidence.³² In general, troops secure in a defensive position lost their

²⁹ Ibid., 179-80.

³⁰ Dodge, *Napoleon*, IV, 125.

³¹ Holtman, *Revolution*, 51.

³² Henry, *Maxims*, XVIII, 23.

aggressive posture and their war-like qualities. Consequently, they lost their effectiveness as a fighting force. Napoleon felt that a failure to take the initiative could have only one result: the fatigue and decline in quality of troops.³³ Thus, a loss of initiative by the commander led to an ineffective fighting force. Such a force could not wage war as determinedly; the French Army was destined for failure if it was not aggressive.

This aggression was also required in the political and diplomatic realm. Napoleon strongly believed that initiative was required for France, because its position in Europe and the world made it an eternal target. Thus, it had to remain in a state of alert, ready to fight an attacking war against a foreign aggressor.³⁴ France's national survival depended on the audacity and offensive ability of its commanders. The Emperor also saw that an army could serve as a useful tool in foreign diplomatic relations. In 1805, he wanted Gouvion St. Cyr to use his army to threaten Naples, stopping the Neapolitan King from joining the Allies in the war of the Third Coalition. This offensive, preemptive strike enabled France to remain in a better position during the war.³⁵ The geopolitical realities of Europe could be maintained or altered simply through Napoleon's use of offensive warfare. His military machine, employed effectively against foes that were already collectively in retreat, won a number of significant victories. He was able to implement his vision of Europe through the use of an offensive system of warfare. Although he did not necessarily subscribe to the idea of an offensive at all costs, he did push the offensive

³³ Bérthier to Marmont, 18 February 1812, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 18503., XXIII, 266.

³⁴ Note, 1 February 1798, *Ibid.*, No. 2411, III, 638.

³⁵ Napoleon to Gouvion St. Cyr, 2 September 1805, *Ibid.*, No. 1976, XI, 209.

as much as possible. De Gaulle held much the same view, taking the middle road against the extreme offensive of Grandmaison and Foch, and the extreme defensive of Maginot and Pétain.

De Gaulle, despite the extremes mentioned above, managed to maintain the basic Napoleonic course in his writings on offensive warfare. Of course, his ideas were not identical in every manner; certainly his justifications for the offensive differed from his masterful predecessor. On the whole, however, his Napoleonic roots are clearly evident from his writings. To begin with, he detested the school of the defensive that had slowly evolved in inter-war France. Marshal Pétain and his sycophants had observed the effectiveness of firepower during the static warfare of the First World War. They adopted a “wait and see” attitude towards warfare, stressing heavy planning and evaluation of terrain.³⁶ De Gaulle could not reconcile his beliefs on the aggressive nature of warfare with the theories pushed by Pétain. However, he did not subscribe to a general theory of the offensive either. Much like Napoleon, he recognized the uniqueness of the situation, and the necessity of adaptation. Offensive as a general theory fit in well with his ideas, *l'offensive à outrance* did not work. The idea, as pushed by the French hierarchy before World War I, called for a constant reliance on the offensive.³⁷ These generals believed themselves the foremost interpreters of Napoleon's offensive spirit. Actually, it was De Gaulle that truly understood the essence of Napoleon's offensive. It was vital to war, but not at all costs.

³⁶ Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, 67.

³⁷ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 83-5.

De Gaulle's conception of the essence of offensive warfare did not stop at a simple pigeonhole placed between two competing French schools of thought. Rather, he was a strong believer in the offensive, much like his famous forebear. He felt that "advances by phases or forward bounds" were required in the warfare of his time.³⁸ He conceived of the importance of a forward movement to army operations. He could not envision an army operation that did not include the use of commander initiative and massive forward movement. He felt that all elements of the army must move forward in a modern version of the Napoleonic blitzkrieg, destroying the enemy army.³⁹ Thus, De Gaulle's offensive resembled remarkably the Napoleonic conception. The forces were expected to move forward at a rapid rate of speed, crushing the enemy in their path. The General did not discount the possibility of a transition from the offensive to the defensive, the same transition mentioned by the Emperor. Indeed, he felt that some operations would spring almost entirely from defensive operations and the eventual response to the enemy position. "A massive counter-attack ... that is therefore the indispensable resort of modern defense."⁴⁰ This definition provides the military theorist with a clear view of De Gaulle's views on defense, offense and the transition in between. Basically, De Gaulle took the idea of Napoleon, that the "best means of defense is attack," and translated it into his own words. He stressed the importance of a counter-

³⁸ Ibid., 74.

³⁹ De Gaulle, *Army*, 139-43. A true discussion of the Gallist conception of the order of battle is not required here. However, he discusses his ideal mix of a forward movement of light and heavy tanks, artillery and infantry, accompanied by aircraft, in detail throughout this work.

⁴⁰ Crozier, *De Gaulle*, 88.

attack in defensive operations. The General's entire system of war was predicated, primarily, on a continued offensive struggle against the enemy, regardless of his position.

De Gaulle's method of employing his offensive army did not differ fundamentally from the ideas of Napoleon. Unfortunately for the historian, he did not really have an opportunity to put his ideas into action. De Gaulle saw only brief action on France's eastern border in 1940; however, his force was woefully insufficient and not at all like the force he envisioned. Consequently, the historian has few concrete examples of De Gaulle's ideas from which to draw. Thus, he must be dealt with almost entirely on a theoretical basis. Thankfully, his writings provide an excellent source of material dealing with his planned use of the offensive.

For instance, he remarked that the next war "will ... be a question of ... getting in the first blow."⁴¹ He foresaw a radical departure from the static method of World War I, as the war of movement returned to the battlefield. He felt that the army with the greatest capability for rapid offensive action would emerge as the victor. In fact, he designed his ideal force with this idea in mind. He wanted to create a professional force as the ultimate assault weapon, capable of destroying the enemy in one blow.⁴² De Gaulle's forces must be capable of advancing constantly, not stopping simply because of unfortunate events on another edge of the battlefield. The General wanted to propel his force ever forward, in wave after wave, against the defenses of his enemy. The overwhelming superiority of the offensive would then carry his force to victory. He emphasized this point in his writing, cautioning against a timid commander. "The

⁴¹ De Gaulle, *Army*, 133.

⁴² Barrès, *De Gaulle*, 40.

incidents of the battle must not be allowed to break the order of the attacks.”⁴³ Basically, he agreed with Napoleon’s assertion that an offensive, once begun, must continue to its conclusion. It must not be stopped because of the death of a general or massive casualties.

This idea should not, however, be misinterpreted as a parroted version of Grandmaison’s theories⁴⁴. Rather, De Gaulle recognized that some instances precluded the use of such a strong offensive movement. The General cautioned of the dangers that lay behind such a use of the offensive. He felt that too much uncontrolled offensive led to an exposed infantry, threatened the lines of communication, and led to general disorder.⁴⁵ Above all else, De Gaulle wanted to win the war. While he advocated the use of offensive in a general sense, he by no means meant to adhere to it in every situation, regardless of circumstances. He was willing to use any means necessary to procure the necessary massive battlefield victory. The General admitted the importance of initiative, but only insofar as it did not harm the war effort.⁴⁶ The nature of offensive warfare, and

⁴³ De Gaulle, *Army*, 146.

⁴⁴ Lieutenant Colonel de Grandmaison was the primary French theorist responsible for the *offensive à outrance* doctrine. He enjoyed the patronage and support of General Ferdinand Foch. His theories formed the foundation of basic French doctrine in the era immediately preceding the First World War. Basically, the French wanted to push the offensive at all costs. The rise of these theories, especially advocated by Foch, was probably a reaction to the disasters in the Franco-Prussian War.

⁴⁵ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 87. An advance undertaken too rapidly basically causes the exposed infantry mentioned by De Gaulle in this case. The artillery would be unable to move into position fast enough, leaving the charging infantry unprotected from the opposing cannon. The communications would be hopelessly extended and tangled as the offensive movement changed into either a retreat or a pursuit. The commander had to ensure that the retreat stayed as orderly as possible.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

De Gaulle's conception of its utilization, was not absolute. Instead, he was flexible in his adherence to this general principle of war, following in the footsteps left by Bonaparte.

De Gaulle's discussions of offensive warfare dealt primarily with the reasons for its implementation. He felt it was very important in many ways, from tactical and strategic concerns, to avoid the all-out destruction of the nation. In a speech delivered to the General Assembly in 1926, De Gaulle emphasized the necessity for offensive warfare. In essence, he feared the offensive capabilities of other nations. He, much like Napoleon, believed in the possible effectiveness of a preemptive strike designed to stop an offensive movement by another nation.⁴⁷ De Gaulle possessed much the same geopolitical analytical skill as his famous predecessor. He did not want another nation to take advantage of an offensive movement against France. Instead, he could use boldness and initiative to forestall an attack by an opposing force.

At the same time, De Gaulle saw the importance of the early days of any conflict. He did not want his nation to be unprepared and surprised. "The initial advantage ... will make it possible for it [the army] to gain important victories during the early days of a conflict."⁴⁸ Offensive action could not help but gain an advantage for his nation and his army. Any small advantage would help in the overall conflict, as many nations could collapse after an initial setback. He looked to the example of Napoleon, especially during his early campaigns, as exemplified by the quick victories at Ulm, Austerlitz and Jena-Auerstadt, which knocked his opponents out of the war with minimal bloodshed by the French. De Gaulle furthered his stance on preemptive strikes, stating, "preventive

⁴⁷ Discours, 1926, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 278.

⁴⁸ De Gaulle, *Army*, 128.

intervention may have a considerable effect on the development of operations.”⁴⁹ Thus, even if an attack did not end the war in a single Napoleonic blow, the massive shock to the opponent’s system could well lead to a quicker cessation of hostilities or begin to slowly erode at national consensus. At any rate, the Gallist conception of a quick strike clearly descended almost directly from Napoleon and his ideas of prevention.

De Gaulle foresaw the importance of the exploitation of gains. The weaknesses of the enemy had to be used against them; unfortunately, many of the opportunities for exploitation lasted only a brief period of time. Only an offensive force, poised to strike, could hope to take advantage of these opportunities. Consequently, De Gaulle disagreed fundamentally with Pétain’s insistence on terrain evaluation before battle, saying that the defensive ideology would only lead to the loss of “the possibility of exploiting any sudden change in the situation.”⁵⁰ De Gaulle could not see an instance in which a defensive force would be better suited to pursue a victory. Instead, only an offensive force could take advantage of a rapidly changing battlefield. The General used historical precedent as his guide in this area. Of course, he relied primarily on the example of the French Emperor. De Gaulle wrote:

In front of the attacker there opened up the road to great victories, those which, by their profound effects and rapid extension, threw the enemy into general confusion, just as the breaking of a pillar may bring down a cathedral in ruins.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Ibid., 130.

⁵⁰ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 94.

⁵¹ De Gaulle, *Army*, 148.

Flamboyant language aside, De Gaulle made an important point with this statement. He proclaimed the overwhelming superiority of the offensive, as it permitted continued operations and victory. A smaller force could possibly defeat a larger, more powerful force simply through the audacity of offensive operations.

Napoleon, as noted above, felt that the nature of France's geography and position in Europe forced it to hold an offensive posture. De Gaulle believed in much the same idea, as he saw the immense power of Germany immediately to France's east in the 1930s. He felt that a strike force, and its accompanying reputation for ferocity and ability, was the only method to avoid extermination by a foreign invader.⁵² An offensive force, as noted above, could exact a greater toll on an aggressive army than could a defensive force. A series of strong fortifications could not hope to repel a strong, mobile opponent. "Any defender who limited himself to static resistance by old-fashioned elements would be doomed to disaster."⁵³ The Maginot Line could not possibly withstand the attacks of a strong enemy like the German Panzer divisions. De Gaulle's wish for a mobile, attacking army fell on deaf ears. The German forces rolled through France to Paris, and the nation fell into the most divisive period of its modern era.

Both Napoleon and De Gaulle stressed the overwhelming importance of offensive operations in a military campaign. War, in their minds, could not be waged effectively through fortifications and a passive attitude. Instead, the offense must be implemented as

⁵² Aidan Crawley, *De Gaulle*, (New York, 1969), 73.

⁵³ Charles De Gaulle, "The Advent of Mechanical Force" (also known as the "Memorandum of the Eighty"), in Crozier, *De Gaulle*, 88. This statement was sent to eighty leading politicians on 26 January 1940 by De Gaulle, as he was fed up with the inability of Paul Reynaud to effect change in the French military structure. Léon Blum, the leading Socialist politician of the time and the former leader of the so-called "Popular Front" government, was finally converted to De Gaulle's ideas by this memo. Unfortunately, it came too late to alter the make-up of French forces, and

soon as possible, giving the force ample flexibility. The ability to counterattack and possibly destroy a potentially larger force rested in the offense. A defensive force had no opportunity for a victory. Once again, the offensive principle of war was created in an attempt to reflect the attitudes of the French Emperor towards war. Although its make-up was greatly altered by the theories of the French military leaders of the early twentieth century, it continued on in the writings of Charles De Gaulle. His emphasis on the offensive, but not at all costs, was a direct descendant of Napoleon's original idea. The offensive continues to be important in modern warfare, as passivity equals defeat.

CHAPTER 5

MASS

A military force cannot reach its optimum level of effectiveness simply by moving forward aggressively against the enemy lines. Rather, a massed movement must be undertaken against a given point on the enemy position. A long, thin line thrust against a strong defensive emplacement has no hope of success; it will lead only to slaughter. Napoleon recognized this aspect of warfare in his writings. Indeed, Charles De Gaulle also acknowledged the need for attacks by large groups of men against a relatively small area. Napoleon, when speaking of the importance of this form of attack, made a comparison to siege warfare. He called for a commander to “concentrate his fire on a single point; once the breach is made, the equilibrium is destroyed.”¹ This statement by Napoleon stands among his most famous. However, it is often misinterpreted. He did not require that his entire force strike a single point; rather, he advocated a heavy attack on the critical weakness of the enemy line, using the hole he created to force a retreat and begin his pursuit. De Gaulle noted the importance of the power of a large force striking an enemy line. In making his comparison, he seemed almost morose in acknowledging the power of attack. “There is a grim relationship between the properties of speed, power

¹ Colin, *L'Éducation Militaire*, 354.

and concentration.”² The General, something of a philosopher-warrior, feared the destructiveness of this force. On the other hand, he saw that a massed attack was necessary to ensure victory. Despite the devastation, he could not ignore the need for such a form of assault.

Napoleon felt that achieving mass was necessary in nearly every battle, as long as it was employed properly. He instructed his brother Joseph, during the campaign in Naples and Italy, to use this principle. “I reiterate that you should for no reason divide your forces ... [your forces should be] disposed in a manner that they may reunite in a day on the battlefield.”³ Napoleon felt that the use of maneuver with a divided force fell only to a gifted commander (see chapter 6). Consequently, he advised his brother, hardly a military tactician, to utilize the simple principle of mass. He could more easily find victory if he deployed his troops against the proper point on the enemy line. In fact, De Gaulle looked on Napoleon as the perfect example of the deployment of troops in massed formations. In his lesson to students at the École Spéciale Militaire de St. Cyr in 1921, De Gaulle commented on the “eternal principles” promulgated by Napoleon, such as his “concentration and placement of his forces before maneuver.”⁴ De Gaulle admired Napoleon’s command principles and use of his forces. As a result, he incorporated Napoleonic principles of war into nearly every aspect of his modern military theory. The Napoleonic legacy is clearly evident in nearly all De Gaulle’s work.

² De Gaulle, *Army*, 78.

³ Napoleon to Joseph, 19 January 1806, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 9685, XI, 665.

⁴ Conférences d’histoire à Saint-Cyr, 1921, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 118.

However, it is first necessary to examine the Napoleonic theory on the use of mass in battle. He conceived of a certain definition for this principle. As mentioned above, he did not advocate an all-out use of mass; instead, he readily adapted to circumstances. In the opinion of many historians, Napoleon's idea of "concentration of effort" stands as the most important of his principles of war.⁵ Napoleon, above all else, wanted to concentrate firepower on a single point, the hinge of the enemy line. After the concentration of this effort, he could use his reserve and cavalry to finish off the enemy. Napoleon represented his idea of mass in a physical equation, comparing the use of troops to the momentum of a large object. "The strength of an army ... is estimated by the weight multiplied by the velocity."⁶ Thus, a force thrust forward rapidly with considerable mass would be nearly unstoppable. The usefulness of a massed force against a single point on the enemy line was paramount, as demonstrated by Napoleon's brilliant First Italian Campaign.

Indeed, Napoleon provided a number of exact definitions on the art of war as it related to mass. The Emperor was a prodigious writer, so naturally some of his statements are relatively contradictory. He claimed that "the art [of war] to this point has consisted of converging a huge amount of fire on the same point."⁷ This statement obviously reflected Napoleon's views as previously recorded. He clearly desired the use of concentrated fire on the decisive point along the enemy's line. Along the same lines, he stated, "The art of war consists, with an inferior army, of always having more forces

⁵ Colin, *L'Éducation Militaire*, 354.

⁶ Barnow, *Maxims*, IX, 12.

⁷ Gagneur, *Napoléon*, 254.

than the enemy at the point of attack.”⁸ In this statement Napoleon gave a slightly altered view of his definition of mass. In essence, he recognized that the presence of heavy firepower at a critical point required the heavy presence of troops. The use of a large force to accomplish a large quantity of fire was unmistakably necessary.

Consequently, Napoleon found it useful to use as much of his force during battle as possible. He violated this principle repeatedly in Russia, as he refused to commit his Imperial Guard. Obviously, the failure to recognize his own principle of war cost him dearly. In any case, he felt that “one must employ, if useful, one’s last man, because, on the day after a complete success, there is no obstacle left.”⁹ Napoleon did not want to neglect any of his forces during the course of a battle. Troops were of no use if not employed in the fighting. Indeed, he wanted to use some of his reserve forces to attack the enemy line at the decisive point in the struggle, providing the critical mass at the critical position.¹⁰ He could not avoid committing this force to battle; the campaign could not be won without their employment. The Emperor had created the reserve during the Consulate especially for the purpose of using it as a decisive force at the conclusion of a battle. However, he did not stop at the use of a reserve. He also felt that artillery should be deployed *en masse* against the same point in the line, as exemplified by Wagram or Borodino.¹¹ These strikes served a dual purpose: they softened up the line for the infantry advance, and they contributed to the overall mass of firepower brought to

⁸ Note, 1 July 1797, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 1976, III, 216.

⁹ Henry, *Maxims*, XCVI, 42.

¹⁰ Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 154-5.

¹¹ Holtman, *Revolution*, 44.

bear against the decisive point. The French Army of Napoleon, fighting against eighteenth century methods, was virtually unstoppable with this system in place.

A Napoleonic battle, if dictated by the Emperor, followed a number of set patterns. He committed his troops in a certain manner, although the exact timing and strength depended on a variety of factors, including the quality of his opponent, the topography, and the ability of his troops. A Napoleonic battle in massed formation consisted of, basically, an overwhelming artillery barrage at the start. After concluding this initial bombardment, Napoleon sent the cavalry forward, followed closely by the infantry. In the event of any difficulties, the Emperor could send the Imperial Guard forward as the decisive force.¹² In the attack, the Emperor utilized mass formations against the weak point in the enemy line in every phase of the battle. He felt mass was very important to the outcome of the battle, since its proper use could decide everything.

Perhaps the most stunning aspect of Napoleon's use of mass on the battlefield was its speed. He was able to deploy and employ forces in a rapid manner, combining and dispersing seemingly at will. French troops moved through the countryside in a dispersed, relatively independent manner. Napoleon, however, incorporated the idea of rapid reconcentration before battle.¹³ This incredible speed was best exemplified by the battle of Austerlitz in which Marshal Louis Davout marched his corps from Vienna eighty-seven miles in only forty-eight hours. Napoleon utilized these dispersed forces, after reconcentration, to form a massed attack. Napoleon basically wanted his forces to fight together, united as a single force on a battlefield. He felt that a group of corps, each

¹² Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 183.

¹³ Holtman, *Revolution*, 42.

fighting independently, could be defeated piecemeal by a concentrated enemy. Thus, he wanted his forces to “move towards a fixed point at which they are to unite.”¹⁴ However, he did realize the possibility of a combined enemy. Indeed, a principle of war, by nature, must be applicable to all armies. Thus, an opponent could easily combine his forces and attempt to mass against the weak point of the French lines. Napoleon, consequently, advised on the proper disposition of troops as they were combined: “A union of various bodies must never be made near the enemy, because the enemy by concentrating his forces may not only prevent their junction but may beat them separately.”¹⁵ As noted above, the Emperor feared the ability of an enemy to defeat his dispersed corps. Thus, he wanted to combine his forces at a distance from the enemy. He would be able to complete his movement before the enemy attack could reach his position. Clearly, Napoleon was considering every aspect of the use of mass in warfare.

The greatest importance of Napoleon’s use of massed troops lay in the tactical plane. He could tactically dominate nearly any battlefield by placing a larger number of men and more firepower on a given enemy position. Indeed, the use of massed columns was almost irresistible by an enemy deployed in line, the dominant formation of most of France’s enemies.¹⁶ The rest of the battle could occur only after the effective use of mass at a critical point along the enemy line. A total destruction of the opposing army, always the goal of a Napoleonic battle, could not occur unless their resistance was broken. Thus, a breach was required, demonstrating the immense importance of an effective massed

¹⁴ Barnow, *Maxims*, XI, 14.

¹⁵ Holtman, *Revolution*, 42.

¹⁶ Dodge, *Napoleon*, III, 280.

attack.¹⁷ Napoleon's entire system of war depended on the creation of a breach in the enemy lines. His background as an artillery officer obviously played a role in his discovery of this truism. He applied much the same ideas that would be utilized in an attack on a stronghold.

Napoleon's conception of the importance of mass also included strategic and diplomatic concerns. The speed of his form of warfare was due largely to necessity. The French Army had to be faster and stronger than all its opponents, since it was the enemy of nearly all of monarchical Europe. Consequently, Napoleon attempted to strike a deathblow to his opponent before the reverse could occur.¹⁸ This idea is much like that mentioned above (see chapter 4), that Napoleon attempted to strike preemptively if possible. He wanted to avoid warfare and bloodshed, as his resources could not match the combined strength of the many coalitions created against France. At the same time, the massed attacks could also help to divide the enemy coalition and break it apart. He often, if fighting against a combined coalition force, chose the joint between the armies as his critical point for the strike. Thus, upon the success of his massive assault, the armies would split and could be defeated and pursued piecemeal.¹⁹ In this regard, his principle of central position clearly comes into play. However, it will be discussed in further detail in successive chapters (see chapter 6).

At the end of his career, as noted above, Napoleon began to violate his own principle of mass. For instance, the Campaign of 1813 saw French forces fighting on

¹⁷ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 189-90.

¹⁸ Dodge, *Napoleon*, III, 155.

¹⁹ Holtman, *Revolution*, 42.

many fronts, from Spain to Italy to Saxony. Napoleon had overstepped his bounds; he could not concentrate his forces and achieve mass in any area. Thus, his enemies, finally grasping some of the Napoleonic principles, began to defeat his armies one by one. If Napoleon were able to combine his forces, perhaps in Saxony, he would have found much greater success.²⁰ However, his political decisions undermined his strategic considerations. He clearly had this idea in mind early in his career, at the conclusion of the Italian Campaign in 1797. Having grown tired of Austrian insolence and problems with the treaty of Campo Formio, Napoleon marched northward into Austria proper. He felt that the combination of all French forces, including those of General Jean-Baptiste Jourdan and General Jean Moreau in Germany, in a single position would bring the Austrians to their knees.²¹ Clearly, Napoleon saw the possible use of mass not only at the tactical level, as mentioned above, but also at the strategic level. A massed force waiting only sixty miles from Vienna was quite a bargaining chip.

Charles De Gaulle certainly did not overlook the importance of this principle of war as espoused by Napoleon. Indeed, he incorporated Napoleon's ideas into his own theory, expressed in a series of lectures and works between the World Wars. He considered concentration – and its application against the enemy in a forward movement – a principle of war.²² Contrary to Napoleon, De Gaulle did not often speak of principles of war and the use of set ideas to ensure success. Rather, he simply stated the need for certain basic tenets in a given situation. However, the General, in this case, clearly saw

²⁰ Dodge, *Napoleon*, IV, 310.

²¹ Note, 1 July 1797, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 1976, III, 215.

²² De Gaulle, *Sword*, 74.

the need for a massive use of troops and firepower. He could not deny the effectiveness of such a deployment. In fact, he considered the presence of massed troops at the critical point of the enemy's line a "necessity."²³ He did not stop at that statement. De Gaulle was well known, perhaps more than for anything else, for his ability to write prosaically.

He applied this ability to his writing on the usefulness of mass in warfare. In essence, he conceived of the French army as a large spear with a wooden shaft. The shaft of this spear was a mass of infantry, ready to punch a hole in the enemy's line (or body).²⁴ Additionally, the spearhead, in his vision, was made up of a mobile striking force, still collected in a large mass.²⁵ The combination of these two, disparate masses would force the enemy to capitulate at the price of being massacred. On this point, however, De Gaulle and Napoleon differed. De Gaulle envisioned the use of cavalry to strike the initial blow in a massed attack, followed by the infantry. The cavalry could then continue the pursuit.²⁶ The cavalry attack would consist of a dense column of tanks, punching a hole through the line and continuing onward.²⁷ These tanks could be

²³ Ibid., 17.

²⁴ Barrès, *De Gaulle*, 32.

²⁵ Crawley, *De Gaulle*, 77.

²⁶ De Gaulle's conception of cavalry included armored cavalry or tanks. Much like Napoleon, he felt that the cavalry should include heavy and light, each with a specific purpose. These tanks would follow up the victory, pursuing as far as sixty miles behind the line. The infantry were used only for the occupation of territory claimed by the fast-moving tanks. The inversion of these two forces seems to be due to De Gaulle's insistence on speed, the same tenet desired by Napoleon. However, De Gaulle felt this need could be met only through the use of tanks. For further discussion, see Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle: The Rebel, 1890-1944*, (New York, 1990) and De Gaulle's own *Army of the Future*.

²⁷ De Gaulle, *Army*, 139.

incorporated on every front, into every battle. They should comprise the primary striking force of the Gallist army, used *en masse*.

Obviously, this attack was not conducted with ease. War, by necessity, required violent action. De Gaulle did not overlook this idea, feeling that his force should act so that “the blows it will deliver will be both sudden and violent.”²⁸ In other words, much like the attack envisioned by Napoleon, the Gallist force moved with weight and velocity. The combination of these two elements made the force virtually invincible. The General despised the ideas of many of his predecessors, even the theories of his one-time mentor and friend, Marshal Philippe Pétain. He felt that massed attacks were better than the modern idea of fixed fortifications. In addition, he disagreed entirely with the World War I strategy of “gnawing away.”²⁹ He saw the obvious problems in probes with small units against the flanks and front of a well-entrenched enemy, the condition in the First World War. Instead, he argued for massed attacks in an effort to create a breakthrough, the same idea employed by Napoleon.

De Gaulle reached back into history to justify his theories; of course, he emerged with Napoleon as his historical precedent. He saw that Napoleon had used the speed of his forces, combined with a rapid reconcentration near the battlefield and a massed attack on a critical point; here Austerlitz and Friedland are perfect examples. He considered this idea a primary principle of military theory.³⁰ At the same time, he agreed with Napoleon’s assertion that nearly all troops should be committed to battle. The hesitancy

²⁸ Ibid., 134.

²⁹ Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, 213.

³⁰ Conférence d’histoire à Saint-Cyr, 1921, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 118.

to use troops could cost a commander the victory he needed; doubt he was thinking of Borodino. The use of troops in this manner led to greater effectiveness, as the mass of troops acted in a concerted manner, and the troops were generally calm knowing that everyone was going to fight together.³¹ De Gaulle agreed with Napoleon on the general make-up of this massive force, and that it should be employed against the opponent's line at a critical point. The agreement on the principles between the two men did not stop at this point, however. De Gaulle also paralleled Napoleon's ideas on the composition and use of this massed force on the battlefield.

As mentioned above, De Gaulle wished that the armored cavalry advanced first in a massed thrust against the enemy lines. He called this force "shock troops," a term never used by Napoleon. In essence, De Gaulle felt that this force, massed the night before the attack from their scattered positions, would strike the enemy line with such force and strength that the enemy would retreat quickly.³² The opposing infantry would be "shocked" and frightened by the sight of the rapidly advancing cavalry, losing their will to resist and retreating. The choice of the proper point for the attack, however, was not to be taken lightly. A rapid, massive force was not guaranteed victory if it attacked the wrong point. The proper location must be based on an assessment of the circumstances of battle as well as the local terrain.³³ De Gaulle's insistence on the evaluation of the battlefield conditions was a direct result of the method of war advocated

³¹ Ibid.

³² De Gaulle, *Army*, 138. By the time of Napoleon's reign, the efficacy of shock troops had come into doubt. Some theorists still advocated the "arme blanche" and the shock value of bayonets and columns. Napoleon, however, felt that a massive attack alone was effective, regardless of any shock value possessed by his advancing columns.

³³ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 93.

by Pétain and others. De Gaulle did not want the attack to progress simply because of an assessment of the terrain prior to battle; rather, war was fluid, changing, and subject to a variety of different stimuli. An *à priori* method simply did not work.

Another aspect of De Gaulle's theory of mass included an artillery bombardment. Although he did not have the artillery background of Napoleon, the General still recognized its effectiveness if used properly. He called for a heavy concentration of fire at the critical point prior to the advance of his shock troops.³⁴ This attack served to prepare the enemy line for the huge thrust by the cavalry and infantry, proving unstoppable if coordinated properly. In the end, De Gaulle's force must move rapidly forward towards the point of concentration, laying down a heavy fire on the objective. A breach had to be created in the line; the cavalry and the approaching infantry could exploit this hole. Finally, the enemy's remnants could be pursued and attacked by the cavalry on hand for just that purpose.³⁵ Thus, the sequence of a Gallist battle resembled sharply that of a Napoleonic struggle.

The importance of mass to a battle simply cannot be overlooked on a number of levels. First, the shock value of a massed attack, implied but not stated by Napoleon, was clearly evident in the General's writing. "It has been found by experience that the revelation of fire inflicted on unsteady troops can have very serious consequences; and everything demands that the shock troops ... should take advantage of them without losing a moment."³⁶ The Gallist force could use its approach to frighten the opponent,

³⁴ De Gaulle, *Army*, 138.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

making the troops fear their possible death, rendering them “unsteady.” The massed force, all the while pouring immense amounts of fire on the critical point, approached and struck the line. Thus, the mass of the troops proved very important in ensuring victory. The enemy could not resist such a charge, and the battlefield would belong to De Gaulle’s forces. At the same time, a large distribution of forces could not help an army. De Gaulle criticized the “weakness of troops spread out,” as their “effective strength [is] often derisory, because it has to be distributed over a large number of units and nuclei of war formations.”³⁷ Not only could such a configuration fail to withstand the attack mentioned above, it could not hope to succeed in any attack. An unmassed force had virtually no chance of success with a normal commander; only a genius like Napoleon or Frederick could hope to win with a division of troops.

On a tactical level, a massed force presented a huge problem for an opposing commander. If he were unable to mass his troops in a quantity equal to his opponent’s at the critical point, he was destined to lose the battle. De Gaulle saw that the only possible method of forcing a retreat was through the creation of a breach in the opposing line.³⁸ The enemy troops, perceiving the gap, could not remain and fight when under attack from the side, front and possibly rear. Instead, a tactical retreat was required. Retreats, however, rarely occurred in good order. A strong pursuit by De Gaulle’s cavalry would render the enemy’s forces worthless. In addition, this explosive advance and pursuit through the hole allowed the occupation of territory.³⁹ The ultimate goal of almost any

³⁷ Ibid., 62.

³⁸ Barrès, *De Gaulle*, 40.

³⁹ De Gaulle, *Army*, 141.

land-based military operation was the occupation and acquisition of territory. The infantry and cavalry, as well as the fast-moving artillery, would be able to move up and occupy the territory abandoned by the retreating enemy. Thus, a hole in the line, created by a massed attack, could allow for the strategic occupation of land. A simple principle could, in essence, lead to a massive victory.

The value of mass, on both strategic and tactical levels of warfare, was obvious. Both Napoleon and De Gaulle clearly evidenced the importance of this particular principle of war. Napoleon created this idea with his massed attacks against enemy positions in almost every campaign. However, it is difficult to separate entirely mass from the next principle of war, maneuver. Only a proper maneuver can enable a general to deploy his troops in a massive attack on a critical point. Once again, the overwhelming importance of the commander was obvious. The entire system of war, as advocated by both theorists, was largely dependent on the ability of the commander to manipulate and decipher the situation. The Napoleonic legacy in this area is clear. De Gaulle's theories could not exist without the influence of the former Emperor. Indeed, Napoleon stands as a giant of the military art; he fought primarily with resources and manpower vastly inferior to that of his opponents. His principles of war serve as his legacy.

CHAPTER 6

MANEUVER

Movement in battle is extremely valuable. Indeed, a static army will most often lose, sometimes with horrific casualties. Attempts to move against the edges of an opponent's army are as old as warfare. Hannibal performed the first recorded instance of a double envelopment against his opponent's rear during the Punic Wars. Napoleon Bonaparte wanted to use maneuver and the placement of his troops in positions unexpected by the enemy. He insisted on "using time and space to meet the enemy under advantageous conditions."¹ In essence, Napoleon wanted to force his enemy to fight at a time favorable to the French forces. He could best accomplish this goal by moving his forces to a position of strength – preferably on his opponent's rear or flank. Obviously, this idea did not descend from Napoleon; however, he was probably the greatest practitioner of strategic and tactical maneuver. Charles De Gaulle learned from this example, and he took the importance of maneuver to heart. "If you cannot penetrate, infiltrate; if you cannot go through the line, go around it."² The two theorists both clearly believed in the overwhelming significance of a maneuver during, and in many cases before, battle. The maneuvers envisioned and practiced by Napoleon were

¹ Holtman, *Revolution*, 41.

² Schoenbrun, *The Three Lives of Charles De Gaulle*, 45.

extremely complex. He did not simply move his massive army to an edge of the opponent's forces. He knew that the enemy would easily counter so simple a movement. Consequently, he tried to confuse his enemy with many different maneuvers, relying on "a vast number of combinations."³ These vast combinations would help him to place some forces on his enemy's line of retreat while still maintaining a presence on every edge of his opponent's line. Napoleon tried to use, for the most part, three different types of maneuver on the battlefield. First, he relied on the central position, the placement of his forces between the wings of the opposing force, best exemplified by the Castiglione Cycle. He also used envelopment, attempting to send one or both wings of his army against the rear of his enemy, shown in the battle of Arcola. Finally, he used simple turning actions against his enemy's flanks, as at Ulm. Although De Gaulle did not study maneuver in such detail, he still had many of the same opinions on its overall importance and implementation. He wanted to restore "the art of maneuvering" to warfare, enabling his force to attack from any angle at any moment during the battle.⁴ De Gaulle never truly had a chance to implement his military theories, since the French effort in the Second World War was ineffective and a failure. The legacy of Napoleon, on the other hand, can still clearly be seen in De Gaulle's writings.

To many, Napoleon stood as the greatest applicator of the theories of movement and maneuver in warfare. His conception of the importance and method of turning movements was one of his greatest contributions to military science.⁵ The military

³ Gagneur, *Napoléon*, 266.

⁴ De Gaulle, *Army*, 68.

⁵ Colin, *L'Éducation Militaire*, 354.

science practiced by Napoleon required a number of factors for success. The maneuvers he employed were not easy; he did not advise that mediocre commanders, like his brother Joseph, use such measures. Instead, he reasoned that these critical maneuvers must be employed only by a true military genius.⁶ Of course, Napoleon had a great genius in mind as he made these blanket statements about the value of maneuver -- himself. He could not envision a greater military leader than himself; he was correct. Napoleon's conception of maneuver, in a general sense, did not stop at that point. Rather, he relied on quick maneuvers, not time-consuming adventures that could easily be discovered and countered by an opponent. He castigated his brother Joseph for his handling of military affairs in Naples, saying of his maneuvers: "they are too slow."⁷ The Emperor could not handle failure by his marshals or by his brother. He envisioned the correct method of waging war, and expected his subordinates to act in the same manner.

As mentioned above, the first of Napoleon's strategic maneuvers, perhaps his most common and most successful, was the doctrine of central position. In essence, he wanted to strike a point between the enemy forces, dividing them in half.⁸ This idea could be employed against a coalition enemy that had separate armies, each of different nationality, attempting to fight together. He could ruin the opposing unity of command with a simple strike and placement of his forces in between the larger enemy force. The assumption of such a position allowed Napoleon to employ a small holding force against

⁶ Ibid., 355.

⁷ Napoleon to Joseph, 31 March 1806, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 10042, XII, 302.

⁸ Holtman, *Revolution*, 42.

one wing of an opponent, using the bulk of his army to destroy the other wing.⁹ The battle of Montenotte was an outstanding example of this technique. This strategy, like any other, was not entirely foolproof. In order to achieve the overwhelming victory that was always a Napoleonic goal, the general had to fight both wings of the army. If the holding force was unable to hold the opposite wing of the enemy, Napoleon risked being attacked from the rear. Consequently, the risk of failure was larger in this “double battle.”¹⁰ The enemy could not hope to fight together, as Napoleon had interposed his dominant forces between them. However, he had to rely on the ability of the marshal defending the holding force against the opposing wing. Each battle had to be coordinated with perfection, or risk defeat.

The use of central position brought with it many advantages. The army was able to work on interior lines. In essence, the force had less distance to move to confront the enemy; it could strike anywhere on the enemy lines, and could also maneuver to cut the enemy’s communications after a successful engagement.¹¹ Napoleon saw the importance of placing his forces in such an advantageous position. He often fought with armies smaller than those of his enemy. The armies that he utilized in the Italian Campaign, as well as the Wars of the Third, Fourth and Fifth Coalitions, were often significantly smaller than those of his enemy. Consequently, he needed to act with wisdom. He saw the danger of allowing his force to be placed in a precarious position by the opponent’s seizure of central position. “It is contrary to all true principle to make corps which have

⁹ Colin, *L’Éducation Militaire*, 355.

¹⁰ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 184.

¹¹ Holtman, *Revolution*, 42.

no communication act separately against a central force whose communications are open.”¹² A general could not hope for any sort of success if he allowed communication between the wings to be severed. The battle could not be coordinated properly, and unity of command was lost. Napoleon instructed his generals, in his absence, to employ this method as much as possible. For example, he told Marshal André Masséna, during the War of the Second Coalition, to “attract the enemy’s attention, obligate him to divide his forces and operate in between with your corps.”¹³ The use of the central position was unknown to commanders of the late eighteenth century. Napoleon used it to great effect, and his opponents needed fifteen years to decipher his system.

Napoleon forced the entire military world to reevaluate its principles and means of achieving success. The Allies could defeat his armies only after they had adopted many of the same principles advocated by the Emperor. The nature of warfare in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, consequently, underwent a series of radical changes. Napoleon’s innovative use of maneuver made the vulnerability of flanks one of the greatest issues in warfare.¹⁴ Both Napoleon and his enemies labored constantly to protect their own flanks while attempting to attack those of their enemy. Warfare had once again become a matter of movement, as opposed to the static battles of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Napoleon sought to turn his enemy’s flank for two primary reasons:

¹² Chandler, *Maxims*, XXVI, 63.

¹³ Napoleon to Masséna, 9 April 1800, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 4711, VI, 272.

¹⁴ Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 87.

he felt the flank was more vulnerable to attack, and he could cause confusion in the enemy ranks.¹⁵

He could not perceive of a more decisive way to end a battle than through maneuver. Napoleon wanted to attack the weakest part of the enemy both to force a retreat and spare his own army. The ability to sew confusion in the enemy lines only helped to cause their withdrawal from the battlefield. Strategic maneuver was unquestionably a method for achieving victory, as “it is by turning the enemy, by attacking his flank, that battles are won.”¹⁶ The Emperor often used a separate corps, moved away from the main force in battle, for the sole purpose of delivering a blow to the enemy flank, like the battle of Friedland. Indeed, Napoleon despised the idea of attacking an enemy in front, a principle that he violated late in his career at Borodino. “Never ... attack a position in front which you can gain by turning.”¹⁷ In other words, maneuver had to always stand as a paramount concern in the mind of a commander. He could not achieve consistent success through a series of attritional battles on prepared positions. Instead, warfare was best waged through maneuver and movement, as it devastated the opponent while maintaining the attacker’s force. At the same time, Napoleon utilized tactical outflanking simply to force his enemy to shift his line of battle and focus.¹⁸ An enemy could be outlanked by shifting troops to an edge of the battlefield and placing them in an attack on the enemy wing. The enemy, fearing an epic

¹⁵ Holtman, *Revolution*, 42.

¹⁶ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 184.

¹⁷ Chandler, *Maxims*, XVI, 61.

¹⁸ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 181-2.

Napoleonic maneuver, would shift its lines and focus primarily on the new source of attack. Napoleon was then free to perform a strategic maneuver on the exposed enemy lines and line of retreat.

At the same time, Napoleon had to keep the other principles of war in mind while performing his maneuvers. "The art of war points out that it is necessary to turn and outflank a wing without separating the army."¹⁹ Napoleon did not want to divide his forces into a number of small units, each responsible for a tactical maneuver. Rather, he preferred to retain unity of command and mass in his attack. The corps used to attack the flank or rear of an enemy would still remain in contact with the rest of the army. As noted above, he did not want his army to lose the ability to communicate. The Emperor even advised Joseph, King of Spain, to use such a maneuver in the fighting against the Portuguese Army in the Peninsula. He advised him to use strategic maneuver against the flanks of the weak Portuguese, allowing him to win the battle decisively.²⁰ The fact that Napoleon relied on Joseph to utilize maneuver, despite his poor record as a commander and against Napoleon's counsel as seen above, show that he truly valued the effect of a maneuver on the outcome of battle.

The final, and most devastating maneuver if used correctly, was Napoleon's envelopment movement. Basically, he maneuvered his forces with one or both wings reaching around the opponent, encircling him and cutting off his communications and line of retreat. This "pincers attack" was virtually inescapable if implemented properly.²¹

¹⁹ Henry, *Maxims*, CII, 43.

²⁰ Napoleon to Joseph, 22 September 1808, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 14343, XVII, 613.

²¹ Holtman, *Revolution*, 42.

The enemy had no chance if he allowed himself to be hemmed in. The defeat of the Austrians and “the unfortunate General Mack” at Ulm stands as a perfect example of this method. Napoleon induced Mack into advancing against Marshal Joachim Murat in the Black Forest, only to envelop him with other forces. Napoleon wanted his army to “concentrate its efforts on the enemy’s most interesting line of communication.”²² However, this particular maneuver was extremely difficult and risky. It left a portion of Napoleon’s line weak and vulnerable to breakthrough. Indeed, if the enemy became aware of the movement it could easily break out. In any case, Napoleon did not ignore the usefulness of such an idea; even if the encirclement was not complete, it could threaten the enemy army and its leaders. Napoleon ordered Masséna, in 1800, to move all available forces around the Austrian army and place them squarely on the line of retreat.²³ Clearly, Napoleon’s use of the encirclement strategy was not limited to a total envelopment. Rather, the final goal in any case was to cut off the enemy’s retreat and communications. If this could be achieved without a battle, the army was spared some losses. Moreover, Napoleon ordered Joseph to take a similar attack, telling him to land his troops in Sicily to surround the remainder of the opposing forces.²⁴ The importance of Napoleon’s maneuver and movement simply cannot be overlooked. He wanted an army to destroy its opponent; total victory was called for at all costs. The French simply could not sustain the losses of a succession of slow-moving, static battles.

²² Colin, *L’Éducation Militaire*, 356.

²³ Napoleon to Masséna, 9 April 1800, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 4711, VI, 273.

²⁴ Napoleon to Joseph, 7 February 1808, *Ibid.*, No. 13537, XVI, 372.

Napoleon spoke often of the importance of sharp, decisive maneuver on the battlefield. He felt that his forces could not be defeated if they moved properly. The greatest value of maneuver was that it would often lead to a decisive victory. Napoleon felt that maneuver was easy; if used properly, it was the surest manner in which to provoke an enemy. In the process, the French could quickly fashion victory and pursue the enemy for a total rout.²⁵ Napoleon, as a means of disturbing and later defeating his enemy, always moved his forces rapidly. He felt that an enemy disconcerted by his movement could not fight effectively. Indeed, a force that was physically and psychologically damaged by Napoleon's repeated, unpredictable assaults could not hope to retain its position. Instead, such an attack set the stage for victory.²⁶ The ultimate goal, of course, was a massive victory over the enemy, destroying the army and ending the nation's ability to resist militarily. Napoleon used many great victories in his campaigns, like Marengo, Jena-Auerstadt and Wagram, to effectively end any attempt by his enemy to fight. A retreat by the enemy gave Napoleon the battlefield and victory. He valued the ability to force an enemy's retreat as the greatest asset of a commander.

Skill in ... warfare consists in occupying positions on the flanks or in the rear of the enemy, leaving him no alternative other than to abandon his positions without fighting in order to take up others in the rear.²⁷

A retreating enemy was virtually no threat to Napoleon and his army. He could leave the battlefield content in the knowledge that his ability to maneuver had carried the day. His

²⁵ Colin, *L'Éducation Militaire*, 355.

²⁶ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 181.

²⁷ Holtman, *Revolution*, 39.

cavalry could begin a devastating pursuit of the enemy, slowly destroying their resistance as they moved, as after Jena or Ulm.

The Emperor also felt that a number of deficiencies of his army could be hidden by effective maneuver. He did not want the enemy to know of his problems; if he kept his opponent off balance, he could distract them from the difficulties on the French side. To begin with, Napoleon felt that rapid movement could rectify a paucity of troops.²⁸ A quickly moving army could easily deceive the enemy as to its size. Davout's corps of approximately 25,000 men at Auerstadt was able to hold off the Prussian force of almost 60,000 because the French corps moved well, making the Prussians fear the presence of a larger French force. Napoleon's forces in Italy were routinely outnumbered, yet he managed to make them appear to be a large force through constant movement and unpredictable strikes from all angles. Napoleon, an artilleryman at heart, certainly saw the importance of artillery to military operations. He felt that rapid movement, both of the army and of the artillery pieces, could conceal a lack of guns.²⁹ The enemy could see only that the artillery shells were arriving from a number of different angles and distances. Napoleon could manipulate this movement to hide his true mass from the enemy.

In the end, maneuver was critical to victory. The Emperor detested frontal assault, fearing both its huge attrition and lack of decisive results.³⁰ Napoleon did not have enough manpower and resources to descend into a war of attrition. As noted above,

²⁸ Chandler, *Maxims*, X, 58-59.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 182.

Lazare Carnot had long ago noted the importance of decisive battles for the French forces. Napoleon recognized that the Empire could survive only if it kept others off the battlefield through quick, decisive victories. To this end, he liked to employ central position and maintain interior lines; he lost sight of both of these goals in 1813, falling victim to coalition forces at Leipzig.³¹ The losses incurred by Napoleon late in his career, from Leipzig to Waterloo, were due primarily to his disregard for his own principles of war. He realized that the breaking of these rules could well lead to disaster. He commented on the dangerous nature of maneuver, telling his brother that a man deviating from normal procedure in a dangerous maneuver that fails was criminally culpable for the deaths of his soldiers.³² Napoleon realized that victory could not be achieved without maneuver; a decisive result was owed primarily to the ability of the commander to outmaneuver his enemy. De Gaulle inherited this same belief. He envisioned himself as the theorist that would finally return warfare to the free movement of Napoleon, using the mobility of troops and equipment to spur total victory.

De Gaulle, in essence, rebelled against the static warfare that was so much en vogue during his tenure in the French Army. Pétain and most of the other powerful French generals of the interwar period expected the trench warfare paradigm of World War I to continue. They felt that a surplus of firepower would achieve victory in battle. De Gaulle, on the other hand, relied on the Napoleonic principles. An excellent student of history, he taught the subject at the École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr in 1921. In his lectures he referred to the “eternal war principles” advocated by Napoleon, especially

³¹ Dodge, *Napoleon*, IV, 228-29.

³² Napoleon to Joseph, 22 September 1808, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 14343,

his creative deployment of troops.³³ He harkened back to Napoleonic times, believing that the principles of his great predecessor would still be applicable in the twentieth century. The efficacy of maneuver could not be overlooked, as victory depended on placing the enemy in an unfavorable position. De Gaulle advocated serious reform of the French Army, calling for a military based on “speed, power, quality, which is to say maneuver and surprise.”³⁴ A military theory that did not incorporate the basic ideas of maneuver and the other principles of war stood as incomplete. It could not possibly hope to help a commander win in the age of movement envisioned by De Gaulle. In De Gaulle’s mind, maneuver had always been very important. It was the responsibility of military theorists to adapt its conception to the changes in weaponry and army size.³⁵ This statement is not intended to imply that military theory was entirely flexible and had to be reevaluated each epoch. Rather, De Gaulle felt that the eternal principles, as noted above, continued. The application of these principles on a tactical level had to be adapted to changing conditions, however.

The importance of maneuver, to De Gaulle, cannot be overstated. He felt that all maneuver must, by definition, be a form of attack. Maneuver was not a passive exercise. Indeed, all maneuver must be performed with an eye towards a decisive result.³⁶ The decisiveness of the grand strategic maneuvers utilized by Napoleon was not in doubt.

XVII, 611.

³³ Conférences d’histoire à Saint-Cyr, 1921, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 118.

³⁴ De Gaulle to Reynaud, 27 Aug 1937, *Lettres*, 451.

³⁵ De Gaulle, *Army*, 60.

³⁶ Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, 213.

Modern warfare required movement. Forces could not hope to find victory by simply sitting in fixed positions, firing massive quantities of ammunition at the enemy. Instead, De Gaulle wanted to return to the era of Napoleon; he wanted a return to a war of movement.³⁷ The General saw all the problems of the French military during the First World War, in which he was taken prisoner at Verdun, and during the malaise of the interwar years. He could conceive of only one solution. He desired to return France to the glory of the Empire, the great military machine of Napoleon. He felt that his goal could only be realized by the creation of a more mobile force.³⁸ The French Army could find the decisive victories that it sought through a conversion to a rapidly moving and striking mass. Maneuverability, and decisiveness in battle, was possible only with a mobile force.

As noted above, De Gaulle wanted a force that moved forward constantly, forever pushing the offensive. He could not conceive of an army that could emerge victorious through remaining on the defensive throughout a war. The massive advance of his troops, however, also had to include maneuver. He wanted his advancing forces, especially the armored cavalry, to be free to maneuver during the course of battle.³⁹ This change of direction, obviously, occurred only on the tactical level. The movement of troops and equipment upon the flanks and rear of an enemy was a decision for the commander, made at the strategic level.

³⁷ Barrès, *De Gaulle*, 40.

³⁸ Schoenbrun, *The Three Lives of Charles De Gaulle*, 55.

³⁹ De Gaulle, *Army*, 140.

De Gaulle did perceive of the need for these strategic maneuvers. He wanted his forces, as much as possible, to move towards the rear of the enemy and its lines of communication. At this point, the forces could effectively aim their fire on the rear and flanks of the formation.⁴⁰ The movement of forces to this point would cause the enemy to disperse rapidly, leaving the French in possession of the battlefield and the undisputed masters of the struggle. The importance of such a maneuver was immense. Indeed, lacking a true example of war, De Gaulle did implement this idea during his time at the École de Guerre. Under his leadership, the so-called blue team feigned a frontal assault against the forces of General Moyrand, the commander of the school. He then maneuvered his troops around the flanks, encircling Moyrand and emerging the victor.⁴¹ This victory, although only in an exercise, was perhaps the best example of De Gaulle's theory of maneuver in action. He utilized Napoleon's movement against the rear of the enemy's line, causing its immediate capitulation.

De Gaulle clearly disagreed with the prevailing theories of the time. He did not like the idea of surveying the ground in advance. Pétain and his followers believed that the entire course of battle could be planned simply from an examination of topography, relying on massive firepower. De Gaulle felt that such an idea only detracted from two

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Schoenbrun, *The Three Lives of Charles De Gaulle*, 45. This incident did not end at this point, however. Moyrand had deliberately placed himself at the head of the opposing force to show De Gaulle that his theories of movement were incorrect. After De Gaulle's victory, he refused to concede Moyrand's point that the victory had been a direct result of the *à priori* method of Pétain. The argument reached all the way to Pétain, at the time still De Gaulle's mentor and friend. He allowed De Gaulle to write a treatise explaining his victory, but refused to give official sanction to any other representation of the war of movement. It is at this point that De Gaulle began to lose respect for his former idol. For further discussion, see Crawley, *De Gaulle* or Crozier, *De Gaulle*.

necessities in war: maneuverability and flexibility.⁴² He wanted the army to have the ability to maneuver according to circumstances, moving on a flank or rear of the enemy based on his weaknesses and disposition. This maneuver on the enemy rear could also help to shorten the conflict. The French Army would not have to sacrifice as many men or as much matériel. The maneuver would cut the enemy off from its base of supply and its retreat.⁴³ They would be forced to surrender, as they had no hope of escape. The formations of many armies at the time were extremely vulnerable to such an attack. Despite advances in technology, most nations still relied on long supply lines in campaigns far from home.

De Gaulle based much of his theory on the problems that he perceived with military formations. He analyzed the “weakness of ordinary formations as soon as they are attacked on the flank or in the rear.”⁴⁴ He saw that most formations would quickly disintegrate into chaos as soon as they were subjected to an attack from a new angle. Indeed, such an attack was almost guaranteed to create confusion at the very least. It was difficult to recover from such a devastating blow. De Gaulle saw actions against flanks as “a frequent method of taking advantage of successes.”⁴⁵ In other words, an army that achieved success in an assault on the perceived weak point on the enemy line could then turn its attention to the wings of the enemy army. A successful attack on the flank would certainly help to force the opponent to retreat. At that point, the army could begin its

⁴² De Gaulle, *Sword*, 93.

⁴³ De Gaulle, *Army*, 150-1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

devastating pursuit and hopeful destruction of the enemy. The final effect of encirclement, however, was devastating. Much like Napoleon's conception, De Gaulle felt that encirclement was the ultimate goal in strategic maneuver. He saw the possibly fatal effects it could have on the enemy. "One can estimate what overwhelming effects could be obtained by the eruption of an armored force pouring out fire in the rear of an army."⁴⁶ A maneuverable force could hope to achieve such a lofty goal. The total destruction of the enemy army was the only possible result of this assault. Much like Napoleon, De Gaulle felt that the destruction of the enemy army must necessarily lead to the defeat of the nation.

Maneuver has been important to military forces since the inception of warfare. Armies must strive to place their opponents in unfortunate positions, making victory much easier. A headlong assault directed on the center of the enemy's position has little hope of success. However, the movement of troops to the extremities of such a position, like the enemy's rear or flanks, cannot help but lead to eventual success. Napoleon's significance in this area is unsurpassed. He, in many ways, is the father of the movement of modern armies. De Gaulle recognized the importance of maneuver as espoused by Napoleon, and applied it to his own theories. Victory in warfare was easily found with the application of the military principles, and maneuver was foremost among these principles.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 149.

CHAPTER 7

ECONOMY OF FORCE

Death and destruction are the primary results of any military struggle. The two sides engage, each in hope of completely destroying its opponent. It is the responsibility of the commander, as noted above, to make decisions regarding the dispositions of the troops. These commanders can not be concerned with the deaths or injuries of individual soldiers. Instead, the larger goal of victory must be kept firmly in mind. However, this fixation on the objective does not entail a waste of life and resources. Instead, the commander must employ his forces economically. Economy of force applies to the use of troops, not the conservation of their numbers. Napoleon understood this principle well, and he employed his troops accordingly. He felt that war needed “a careful balancing of means and results.”¹ In other words, the commander had to utilize his force just to the extent necessary to gain the desired result. He had to split his troops, perhaps using a smaller force to hold off an enemy as he employed the bulk of the army in the primary attack. Napoleon utilized his forces, from time to time, in simple delaying or holding actions.

Charles De Gaulle understood this necessity, despite the fact that he almost never had the opportunity to lead troops into battle and certainly had no chance to employ

¹ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 144.

economy of force. He saw the nature of war, and recognized that the achievement of objectives required sacrifices on the part of the commander. He wrote:

The ideal of those who wage it [war] remains, none the less, economy, the least massacre for the greatest result, a combination of forces making use of death, suffering, and terror in order to attain the goal as quickly as possible.²

De Gaulle wanted the same results as Napoleon, and he wished to achieve them while maintaining an economy of force. His forces had to be placed judiciously to secure as much impact from each unit as possible. He felt that this economy was not easily achieved. Rather, the commander had to carefully decide exactly how to employ his forces, utilizing every principle of war. The army had to be placed in a position to gain the greatest effect from its manpower. De Gaulle relied on Napoleon's example to help him formulate his military theories. Napoleon's influence on De Gaulle was unmistakable.

Napoleon was a proponent of mass. However, he did not advocate the use of mass at all costs. In some cases, he used as few troops as possible, holding others in reserve or placing them in another area altogether. For instance, the massive victory of Austerlitz was regarded by Napoleon as his greatest masterpiece. In this battle, Napoleon deployed only one division on his right flank to contain 40,000 enemy troops. While his enemy struggled to overcome his holding force, the Emperor concentrated the bulk of his forces at another point on the battlefield to achieve massive superiority where his enemy was weakest. Napoleon could not hope to mass his troops at one point, but sought to concentrate sufficient combat force at the primary location to overcome his enemy. Even

² De Gaulle, *Army*, 151.

early in his career, Napoleon commented on the necessity of distributing his forces so as to meet each component of the enemy force.³

As briefly mentioned above, planning also played a role in the economy of force. The commander and his staff had to decide on a primary objective, using everything possible in an effort to achieve this goal. Thus, the commander could detach only enough troops to achieve his secondary objectives.⁴ The French forces could not be distributed so as to fail to meet any goals. The commander had to decide on the appropriate minimal force to achieve his secondary goal while retaining enough forces to gain his primary objective. The complexity of war required a man of genius to make these decisions. Napoleon certainly fit this description.

Napoleon's belief in an economy of force was, above all else, practical. Although Napoleon did not include the necessity of employing an economy of force in many of his writings, he clearly utilized this principle in nearly all of his operations. It was critical to maintain the adequate number of troops for the primary objective, dispatching forces to a secondary objective only after this evaluation. He did not want to mass his forces inappropriately, nor did he want to stretch his forces too thin. In essence, he wanted his forces distributed so the various wings and separated units of his army would be able to withstand blows from the enemy.⁵ Due to the lack of written commentary on this subject, Napoleon's reliance on economy of force is best described by his operations. Napoleon did not like defensive warfare, but his use of a secondary force to contain a superior force

³ Note, 1 July 1797, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 1976, III, 214.

⁴ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 144.

⁵ Colin, *L'Éducation Militaire*, 356.

was in fact defensive, but a brilliantly conceived deployment. Napoleon's armies could achieve defensive objectives if circumstances required such an operation. In 1805 the Emperor gave Masséna 42,000 men in northern Italy to contain 95,000 Austrians led by Austria's most skillful commander, Archduke Charles. At the same time, Napoleon massed 180,000 troops about 300 miles to the north to overwhelm Mack's forces at Ulm – a brilliant demonstration of the use of economy of force.

Basically, the key to economy of force was the abilities of the commanders, usually two, engaged in the operation. This delicate balance could be maintained only if the two commanders were master strategists and tacticians. If employed properly, economy of force could lead to spectacular results. The overall commander could not use too many troops; he also could not commit too few resources too late in the battle to have an effect.⁶ The inclusion of only a few troops late in a losing battle could have only one effect: the loss of further life. The economy of force required that troops be used only insofar as they did not detract from the achievement of the primary objective. De Gaulle inherited Napoleon's ideas on economy of force and attempted to transfer these ideas to his own theories. The delineation of objectives, and the use of a force appropriate to achieving his objectives, was important in the employment of armies.

De Gaulle felt that economy of force was extremely important in the employment of a successful army. Indeed, he had looked to Napoleon as an example of the proper use of troops in this matter. He believed that Napoleon's "economy of forces" was an eternal

⁶ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 144.

principle of war.⁷ The deployment of troops and resources in such a manner as to best achieve the primary objective was an absolute necessity in De Gaulle's mind. Indeed, the decisions behind such deployment were the sole responsibility of the commander. He had to use his forces judiciously, massing and dispersing his troops according to his strategic plan. In fact, he considered "the economic employment by a commander of the forces at his disposal" a principle of war.⁸ De Gaulle obviously relied, at least to some extent, on the writings and theories of Napoleon in making his determination of the importance of an economy of forces. Napoleon, as explained above, considered the use of troops for the achievement of a secondary objective a principle of war. He wanted to employ his army in a manner so as to make them as useful as possible. Once again, De Gaulle's ideas were almost identical. The General said, "a commander must so dispose his forces as to be able to employ them most usefully."⁹ The utility of forces, in De Gaulle's mind, was severely limited if they were not employed properly. Much like Napoleon, De Gaulle placed the weight of decision on the proper economy of force on to the commander.

De Gaulle was a student of history. He liked to look at events in the past, ranging from Hannibal to Napoleon to the First World War, to find explanations for events. However, his ability to understand military affairs extended to the present and the future as well. He had seen the eventual development of a mechanized warfare, an idea that became a reality with Germany's Panzer divisions. In the final analysis, De Gaulle felt

⁷ Conférences d'histoire à Saint-Cyr, 1921, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 118.

⁸ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 74.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

that the French had fallen to this massive assault, at least in part, because of a lack of what he regarded as economy of force.¹⁰ Basically, the French had fallen into a defensive mentality. Although a defensive mindset did not automatically lead to defeat, De Gaulle felt that the interwar leaders had severely miscalculated. The primary objective had to be the destruction of the opposing army, not the simple defense of the frontiers. The government constructed a series of fortifications along the eastern frontier with Germany. However, the leaders neglected to provide mobile forces to contain the rapidly moving German units while a massive counterattack was launched in a contiguous area. Consequently, the French Army was unable to respond as the Germans attacked with their new-age blitzkrieg. Their failure to apply the idea of an economy of force led to the German penetration deep into France with little resistance. De Gaulle had seen this problem in advance, but he was regarded as an outsider.

The study of the theories of Napoleon and De Gaulle inextricably leads back to one aspect: the importance of the commander and the choice of subordinates on whom he relied for his complementary operations. He was responsible for all decisions made on the battlefield, good or bad. Consequently, the commander needed to have a certain amount of genius, an ability to understand the moment for attack and the proper numbers and combinations of troops necessary for employment. He also had to have the judgment to recognize the qualities of subordinates who could undertake such an operation successfully. Neither Napoleon nor De Gaulle devoted a large part of his writing to this particular area of military theory, but Napoleon tried to employ it in almost every battle in which his armies were engaged. In the end, economy of force was very important to

¹⁰ Barrès, *De Gaulle*, 31.

both men, because it was a major requirement for victory from the Age of Napoleon through the World Wars and even in the Gulf War of 1990.

CHAPTER 8

SECURITY

A military force cannot succeed unless it is protected from its enemies. The military art does not begin and end with the tactical and strategic actions on and around the battlefield. Actually, military leaders must also concern themselves with the different aspects of security. Indeed, security can be broken into two primary divisions: informational and physical. In other words, a military force must protect itself from the enemy by protecting its communication and attacking the communication of the other side. In addition, the force must guard against surprise, erecting strong positions and using small units to protect itself. Napoleon was certainly a master of this aspect of warfare; his army almost always had superior information, and he was rarely surprised. He felt that “the natural positions which are commonly met with cannot secure an army against the superiority of a more numerous one, without the aid of art.”¹ Basically, Napoleon believed that only a commander skilled in the military art could practice proper security. It was not an easily achieved aspect of warfare. Moreover, De Gaulle considered “security for oneself” a principle of war.² He believed that an army had to

¹ Barnow, *Maxims*, XVII, 18.

² De Gaulle, *Sword*, 74.

maintain security against its opponent in order to succeed. De Gaulle envisioned the same divisions of security mentioned above.

Napoleon considered the lines of communication as among the most important components of an army. Indeed, as mentioned in the chapter regarding maneuver, he felt that an army that lost its communications would be defeated. The leader of such a force, in Napoleon's mind, deserved death.³ The lines of communications were among the most important principles of war to any commander; indeed, they were thought of as almost sacrosanct. Commanders in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries had become so committed to the protection of lines of supply and communications that they feared maneuver. Neither Napoleon nor De Gaulle fell into this trap; they both realized that all the principles of war needed to be addressed equally. De Gaulle felt that security also contained a good deal of intelligence. He wanted his forces to know as much as possible about the enemy. "The results at which it [war] aims can be achieved only if the nature of the enemy is kept constantly in view."⁴ The proper disposition of forces could be achieved only after an examination of the enemy and his capabilities. Of course, this principle also tied in closely with the objective, as planning was necessary for both ends.

Napoleon was among the greatest practitioners of security that the military world has ever seen. Secrecy was more than simply a portion of his military art. He devoted countless man-hours to hiding his intentions and divining those of his enemy. His approach to secrecy could be termed a system.⁵ Napoleon created a method of waging

³ Napoleon to Joseph, 24 September 1808, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 14347, XVII, 615.

⁴ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 15.

⁵ Colin, *L'Éducation Militaire*, 364.

this war through deception. He perfected methods of intelligence and secrecy. His communications were the most secure of any European army. Indeed, he was secretive not only as to his operations, but also regarding his methods of conducting war.⁶ It is claimed on questionable evidence that Napoleon did not like the presence of Baron Antoine de Jomini on Ney's staff as his aide-de-camp. He feared that Jomini would attempt to quantify the Napoleonic method in his writings. Thus, he tried to exclude Jomini from many of his operations.⁷ In 1808, he instructed his brother Joseph on the importance of security in operations. He ordered his brother to maintain the utmost secrecy in his operations in Naples.⁸ Although Napoleon was not present in Naples to direct his brother's military operations, he attempted to instill in his brother the basic truism of the importance of secrecy and security.

Napoleon's emphasis on security did not end at military operations. French internal security was greatly tightened both before and during any campaigns. The Emperor saw that information could slip just as easily within his domains as without.⁹ The military secrets of France had to be guarded as much as possible. Napoleon wanted to maintain every advantage possible on the battlefield. He could accomplish this goal by forbidding his enemy any knowledge of French operations. He tried to impart this idea to his marshals, hoping they would recognize the need for security. He wrote to Masséna:

⁶ Dodge, *Napoleon*, IV, 692.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Napoleon to Joseph, 7 February 1808, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 13537, XVI, 369.

⁹ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 146.

“You know only too well, Citizen General, the importance of this most profound secret.”¹⁰ The need for security was overwhelming in Napoleon’s opinion. The enemy had to be kept in the dark as to French intentions. This desire was exemplified by his Egyptian Campaign of 1798, his crossing of the Great St. Bernard Pass in 1800, and numerous movements in battle, including Ulm and Jena. Napoleon could not bear to be surprised or to have his plans fail because of an educated maneuver on the part of his enemy.

Napoleon utilized a number of different means to wage a war of information against his opponent. He supplied a steady stream of misinformation, using many different channels. He sent fake deserters, used his ample propaganda machinery, and even manipulated the press (especially *Le Moniteur*) to his desires.¹¹ He could conceal his operations simply by convincing his enemy that his intentions were entirely different. The enemy would have a difficult time in deciphering the true nature of French movements. Once again, Napoleon expected his brother to perform many of the same functions. For an operation in Italy in 1805, Napoleon instructed his brother to dress as a general of division. He was to refer to his accompanying marshal as “lieutenant.” Above all else, the Emperor’s brother was forbidden from telling anyone of his destination in Italy.¹² This instruction by Napoleon contained two separate aspects of security. First, Napoleon wanted to maintain the secrecy of his plan, telling Joseph to remain silent

¹⁰ Napoleon to Masséna, 9 April 1800, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 4711, VI, 273. The exact nature of this secret was not revealed by Napoleon in his letter. Apparently, he also recognized the necessity for secure written communication.

¹¹ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 146.

¹² Napoleon to Joseph, 31 December 1805, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 9633, XI, 632.

regarding the goal of the operation. Second, Napoleon wanted to portray Joseph and his marshal as different people, hoping to misinform the enemy about French doings on the Italian peninsula.

Napoleon's campaign of misinformation against his enemies also included physical manipulation. He moved troops back and forth between units, making it difficult for the enemy to discern the exact size and disposition of his army. He also altered the appearance and formation of these troops.¹³ The enemy could not figure out the exact nature of Napoleon's army, nor could it decipher his intentions. False troop movements, such as feints, also played a part in Napoleon's conception of security. Indeed, the French Army practiced this art in its highest form. Napoleon expected Masséna to use such methods in the War of the Second Coalition in an effort to mask French intentions.¹⁴

Secrecy also extended to the actual battlefield. Napoleon did not want the enemy to hear French plans or decipher French intentions through troop movement. Consequently, he scouted the enemy positions well, expecting his troops to remain vigilant for attacks both day and night. For example, Napoleon rode near the Prussian lines at night prior to the battle of Jena. Upon his return, the French sentries challenged him, relenting only after seeing his face.¹⁵ The excellent covert movement of Napoleon and his staff did not give away the French presence to the Prussian pickets. At the same time, his force employed excellent perimeter security, watchful for an attack by the

¹³ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 146-7.

¹⁴ Napoleon to Masséna, 9 April 1800, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 4711, VI, 273.

¹⁵ Las Cases, *Souvenirs*, 115.

Prussians, a nation notorious for nighttime fighting. The need for quiet in movement was important anywhere that a French army fought. Napoleon feared the ability of the King of Naples to enter the fighting on the side of Austria in 1805. Consequently, he hid his intentions from the Neapolitan Army. Napoleon ordered St. Cyr to move his troops as quietly as possible from northern Italy into the Germanic states.¹⁶ The King of Naples would not know of the French movements until the campaign was concluded if St. Cyr achieved the stealth required by Napoleon. The Emperor protected his forces not only through this impeccable use of information and quiet movement, but also through physical barriers.

The most important aspect of the army, in Napoleon's opinion, was its line of communication. He felt that an army with its communication cuts could no longer function effectively. Consequently, he sought to cut the lines of communication of his opponent while maintaining his own. He employed a dense cavalry screen for a dual purpose: to conceal movement and to protect communications.¹⁷ This screen kept the enemy from moving against Napoleon's rear, his weakest area. An opposing army could not cut through the cavalry screen to reach the line of communications behind the French Army. The Emperor feared that if his communications were cut, his troops would lose morale.¹⁸ Not only would the army have lost the means to communicate with its base, it would also lose the line of retreat. The cutting of this line ended any possibility of further

¹⁶ Napoleon to Gouvion St. Cyr, 2 September 1805, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 9176, XI, 209.

¹⁷ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 146-7.

¹⁸ Napoleon to Joseph, 24 September 1808, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 14347, XVII, 615.

supplies of food and matériel, as well as precluding the possibility of evacuating the wounded and sick back to France. In short, Napoleon's army could not afford to lose its lines of communication. Napoleon believed fully in a set of rules for campaigns. He felt that the most important rule of troop movement and security in a campaign was to "possess a secured line of communications."¹⁹ The security of this line of communications allowed Napoleon to move on to other forms of physical security. However, on occasion, he was willing to abandon his line of communications in pursuit of his enemy, as demonstrated during the First Italian Campaign.

Flank security had long been a problem for all European armies. The greatest peril for an army fighting in linear formation was an attack on the flank.²⁰ Most battles, including those fought by Napoleon, were won by an attack on a flank. Napoleon tried to eliminate this problem, hoping to have sufficient warning of any enemy movement against his weakest areas. Indeed, he proclaimed that the army must have both flank and advance guards, forever vigilant in warning of enemy movements.²¹ Napoleon could not permit his force to be surprised by an enemy attack on a flank; such an attack could only lead to disaster for the French. Thus, he tried to guard his flank in any way possible. The exposure of a flank to an opponent, in Napoleon's opinion, was perhaps the worst sort of military idiocy. "Nothing is more rash, or more opposed to the principles of war, than a flank march in the presence of an army in position."²² A general that attempted such a

¹⁹ Napoleon to Joseph, 22 September 1808, *Ibid.*, No. 14343, XVII, 613.

²⁰ Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 87.

²¹ Barnow, *Maxims*, VII, 11.

²² *Ibid.*, XXX, 24. Henry's *Maxims* contains a similar statement, CVI, page 43, declaring

maneuver was bound to be attacked, driving a wedge between the ranks of his army. The security of the flanks, especially during the night or while encamped awaiting battle, was best given through use of the surroundings. However, this desire did not preclude Napoleon's decision to expose his right flank at Austerlitz so the Russians would expose theirs on the Pratzen Heights.

Napoleon felt that an invading army could not be too cautious. It had to protect its communications foremost. After the security of the communications had been assured, the army had to place its wings on natural boundaries or neutral countries.²³ The security of the line could be assured through this method. Napoleon wanted to avoid a strategic outflanking by his opponent. He needed to place impassable obstacles in the path of his enemy; the Emperor would remove these obstacles by maneuver at the moment he chose for attack. Napoleon felt that an army, given a chance, could render its position impregnable to an attack on its flanks, if the commander utilized the proper means of security. "A good army of 35,000 to 40,000 men, should in a few days, especially when flanked by a great town or river, render its position [unassailable] by an army twice its number."²⁴ Thus, an army with an appropriate base or anchor on the local topography could secure its flanks against a much more powerful force.

However, a war entailed numerous movements and maneuvers on the part of the two armies. Strong geographical features were not always present, as Napoleon and the

that a flank march, if absolutely necessary, had to be completed as quickly as possible. His continued success may be attributed, to some degree, to this knowledge of maneuver appropriate for warfare.

²³ Ibid., III, 6.

²⁴ Henry, *Maxims*, XCIV, 42.

Grande Armée discovered in Poland during the campaigns of 1806-7. In such a situation, Napoleon felt that an army had to secure its position by man-made defenses during the night. "In a war of march and maneuver, if you would avoid a battle with a superior army, it is necessary to entrench every night, and occupy a good defensive position."²⁵ This statement did not advocate a transition to defensive war; rather, it was meant to convey the necessity of security on the wings. A superior force could place itself in a strong position during the night, making escape and maneuver impossible. Napoleon valued immensely the ability to move his troops into a position during the night, unseen by his enemy. In the final analysis, Napoleon's organization of the army helped a great deal in physical security. The various *corps d'armée* were dispersed over the countryside, but always within support distance of each other.²⁶ This method of placement of troops ensured that a corps surprised by an enemy movement on its flanks could hope for support. Thus, each corps needed only to hold on until support arrived in the form of another corps. Napoleon's system valued security, and he constructed an unmatched wall of security around his armies and his intentions.

De Gaulle certainly did not overlook the necessity of this extreme security to the success of military operations. Unfortunately, he had little opportunity to implement such a system as a military leader. He saw the importance of secrecy for a military force. Like Napoleon, he did not want the enemy to discern any of his intentions or movements before battle. He felt that proper operations could only be achieved by "means of secrecy, observed in conversation, orders and reports by those who prepare plans and

²⁵ Chandler, *Maxims*, XVII, 61.

²⁶ Barnow, *Maxims*, VII, 11.

make decisions, and by the concealment of preparations, but also under cover of a third veil of make-believe.”²⁷ This statement included all of the different aspects of secrecy in a military force. De Gaulle did not want any of the secrets held by members of his army to slip out, only to be used by the enemy. Instead, success was best achieved through the maintenance of absolute secrecy.

Only after secrecy was achieved could deception begin. Much like the Emperor, De Gaulle believed in the necessity of an elaborate scheme of misinformation. Napoleon’s effort to convince Tsar Alexander’s aide-de-camp that he was unprepared for an attack at Austerlitz was a perfect example. The enemy could not perform adequately if it did not know or understand the French disposition of forces. De Gaulle envisioned a number of different methods that could be used to achieve this goal. He felt that false movements could be used to great effect. In addition, the French Army could create false trails, misleading the enemy as to the true position of the army. The French could even employ false sounds in an attempt to throw the enemy off the trail.²⁸ De Gaulle wanted his forces to move with a minimum of enemy interference. The French forces, as in the era of Napoleon, wanted to engage the enemy only after gaining a favorable position. To this end, De Gaulle proposed the use of camouflage.²⁹ The enemy could not hope to outmaneuver the French Army if it were very well concealed. The enemy would be deceived as to the true position of the army, and De Gaulle could strike at the moment he deemed appropriate.

²⁷ De Gaulle, *Army*, 136.

²⁸ Ibid., 137-8.

²⁹ Barrès, *De Gaulle*, 39.

De Gaulle devoted a large portion of his discussion on security to intelligence. Much like Napoleon used his cavalry as information gatherers, De Gaulle wanted to know everything about the enemy. He believed that a lack of intelligence, regardless of the excellence of a commander or an army, would lead to failure. “A general with an excellent army most carefully deployed for battle will yet be defeated if he is insufficiently informed about the enemy.”³⁰ In other words, intelligence assumed paramount importance in any military situation. An unknown enemy was De Gaulle’s greatest fear. He felt that Napoleon’s use of intelligence, his ability to understand his enemy and prevent surprises, was the perfect example.³¹ De Gaulle tried to model his ideas on Napoleon’s gathering of intelligence. He wanted to achieve the same basic goal: knowledge of his enemy and his intentions. De Gaulle admired the “curtain of cavalry” that swept across the nations of Europe, bringing Napoleon all the information he required on friends and foes alike.³² Although De Gaulle did not have such an apparatus in place, he still valued information. He did not want to be surprised on the battlefield. Indeed, security was paramount in his mind – he wanted to accurately assess the enemy while protecting himself.³³ This two-pronged approach to security was the essence of the Napoleonic conception. De Gaulle adopted the Napoleonic model of security and intelligence gathering.

³⁰ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 74.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

³² Conférences d’histoire à Saint-Cyr, 1921, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 118.

³³ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 17.

The General also adopted Napoleon's emphasis on the importance of the lines of communication. He felt that the loss of these lines could not help any military force; indeed, the results could be disastrous.³⁴ De Gaulle believed in the necessity of the maintenance of these lines for many of the same reasons mentioned by Napoleon. An army could not function effectively without its leader; neither could it function without communication. An army divided, without communication, had no chance of survival. An army cut off from its home could not continue to fight.

De Gaulle saw the danger of the flanks for an army. Just as Napoleon feared any march in the face of an established army, De Gaulle did not want to take any risks on the battlefield. He did not want his army to attempt to concentrate in the face of the enemy.³⁵ Such a maneuver could only leave the force open to an attack on its flank or wing. Masséna actually performed such an operation at Wagram, marching in front of the Austrian forces to successfully cut off their flank attack. Fortunately for the French, the march was a success. The concentration of forces would require a mass movement of units, some undoubtedly passing in front of the enemy. This movement gave the enemy too much opportunity to strike, leaving De Gaulle's force in a desperate situation. To this end, he required that his army be "well-protected."³⁶ The commander had to place his troops in a position to maintain physical security. The enemy could not be permitted to launch an attack on the weakest portions of the French Army. Indeed, De Gaulle took many of his ideas on flank security from the writings of Napoleon.

³⁴ De Gaulle, *Army*, 130.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 131.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 126.

De Gaulle did not want his army to ever fall into a vulnerable position. It was the responsibility of the commander to deploy his troops accordingly. In essence, the commander had to place his troops so as to “guard against surprise attacks.”³⁷ De Gaulle evaluated French attempts at a creation of security in the interwar years as dismal. Certainly, he did not disapprove entirely of the idea of fortresses. He felt that such structures had usefulness if used to assure perimeter security. The French needed to defend the primary routes into France, keeping foreign invaders from moving into French territory.³⁸ These fortresses had to be supplemented, of course, with a properly mobile force. However, the large guns and fortified locations were very useful for removing the risk of sudden, surprising enemy attacks. De Gaulle felt that the Maginot Line was a violation of this basic principle. The line did not fulfill even the most basic objective of security of the border. Instead, the planners had left a large gap near the Ardennes Forest, and had not placed any security on the Belgian frontier.³⁹ De Gaulle knew that these structures were destined for failure; they could not hope to stand up to any foreign assault. The planners had neglected to secure any of the frontiers, hoping instead that the attackers would move directly into range of the guns. De Gaulle wanted the flank secure; in this desire he echoed Napoleon.

The need for security was paramount to both De Gaulle and Napoleon. Each man saw that an army could be successful in a campaign only with total security. This idea

³⁷ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 85. De Gaulle actually demonstrated this idea in his campaigns against the Germans in northeastern France in early 1940. He attacked the extremely vulnerable German lines, driving a salient into the Panzer formations. He achieved this advance because the German tank drivers and commanders had grown complacent after the lack of resistance by Belgian and French troops.

³⁸ Crawley, *De Gaulle*, 51.

required assurance both in terms of information and physical safety. The enemy could not learn of French intentions, yet the French needed to gather all the intelligence possible. The lines of communication had to remain open; without them, all was lost. The army had to be spared from surprise and flank attacks through a systematic application of force to the proper areas. In the end, Napoleon's system, so masterfully employed, became the basis for De Gaulle's theory. Napoleon remains the greatest general of history in the use and manipulation of men and information. De Gaulle tried to imitate that mastery in hope of saving France from itself.

³⁹ Ibid., 73.

CHAPTER 9

SURPRISE

The deception of the enemy is another component of victory in warfare. This deception, however, must be used effectively. A commander who does not take advantage of the situation has wasted his time. The proper exploitation of this time often requires a surprise attack. The enemy, already off balance due to the campaign of deception, cannot mount a defense against a surprise maneuver by a more aggressive opponent. Napoleon certainly believed in the need for surprise in battle. Indeed, he advocated a system of war that constantly kept the opponent off-balance. "A well-established maxim of war is, not to do anything which your enemy wishes."¹ The opponent could not be allowed to fight on an equal footing. Napoleon envisioned a war in which the opponent was constantly put at a disadvantage. He wanted every advantage, however small, against his opponent for the duration of hostilities. De Gaulle held much the same view; he felt that the opponent could be easily disrupted from his system of warfare by a simple surprise attack, or at least an unanticipated operation. He could "imagine the state of stupor into which these confident people were plunged by this disruption."² De Gaulle saw that an opponent could be demoralized by a surprise attack.

¹ Barnow, *Maxims*, XVI, 17.

² De Gaulle, *Army*, 132.

Indeed, such an enemy could lose its will to fight after a conclusive defeat. The enemy forces would begin to feel impotent, subject to the mercy of the aggressor.

Napoleon did not doubt the presence of surprise in all of his operations. In fact, he welcomed surprise and all the advantages it brought to him on the battlefield. He felt that any commander that controlled the element of surprise could control battle. He claimed, "War is composed of nothing but surprises. While a general should adhere to general principles, he should never lose the opportunity to profit by these surprises."³ Thus, Napoleon felt that his principles of war were important, but not to extremes. The commander had to possess the initiative on the battlefield, much like Napoleon's ideas on offensive. He had to gain in some form or another from every opportunity to surprise his opponent. De Gaulle felt much the same way. He saw the value of surprises and unknown quantities in battle. "War is an activity in which the contingent plays an essential part."⁴ De Gaulle wanted the commander to profit from every "contingency" that arose during battle. If the leader had the opportunity to use surprise, it was absolutely essential that he assume the initiative.

Napoleon certainly valued the initiative. As noted above, he felt that any army that lost the initiative, falling back into a defensive posture, was lost. Victory could simply not be gained through the defensive, constantly waiting for the opponent's action. He instructed St. Cyr, "It is essential that you have the initiative in movement."⁵ This initiative moved almost directly into the principle of surprise. Napoleon expected his

³ Holtman, *Revolution*, 41.

⁴ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 15.

⁵ Napoleon to Gouvion St. Cyr, 2 September 1805, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 9176.

commanders to constantly use surprise to the detriment of their opponents. Although many different methods were possible in achieving this surprise, Napoleon favored speed more than any other. His armies moved faster over greater distances than any army in history to date. Many historians assert that “rapidity [was] an essential and primordial factor in Napoleon’s warfare.”⁶ The scope of Napoleon’s use of speed was truly felt in his principle of surprise. He could place his army in positions not considered possible by opposing commanders. Napoleon’s armies could maneuver more effectively given their speed. The combination of these factors made surprise an everyday occurrence for the French Army. Napoleon’s opponents had a difficult time countering this method.

Of course, Napoleon enjoyed practicing security before the battle. He did not want his opponent to divine his intentions. Indeed, he especially liked to conceal his position and movements. However, after this veil of secrecy was lost and the opponent had learned of his relative position, Napoleon employed the speed of his army to stun his opponent, placing a force on his enemy’s flank in total surprise.⁷ For example, Marshal Louis Davout’s amazing march on the nights before the battle of Austerlitz enabled him to strike the Austrian advance, halting the forward movement and allowing Napoleon to employ Soult’s corps in an enveloping maneuver. This arrival greatly shocked the Austrian forces, as they had not expected the sudden arrival of such a force, thinking them well out of position.

XI, 209.

⁶ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 148.

⁷ Ibid., 147.

The final aspect of Napoleon's definition of surprise included the areas that were acceptable for maneuver. He had read Bourcet's work on mountain operations. Indeed, Bourcet commented on the narrow defiles and passes throughout the mountain ranges, especially the Alps. The rocky terrain and outcroppings of rocks allowed army units to hide very effectively. Such a force could easily launch a surprise attack on an unsuspecting enemy. Consequently, Napoleon advised against any fighting in the mountains.⁸ He recognized the value of surprise in all operations; he also saw that the principle could be used against his army. Mountains were a fertile terrain for surprise. Thus, he avoided mountains unless he had the opportunity to strike an opponent in such a trap. The Campaign of 1800 in Austria and northern Italy was a perfect example of this application. Napoleon ordered Masséna to hold off the enemy forces, leading them towards the mountain passes in western Italy.⁹ Once there, the French forces laying in ambush could attack. The Austrians would be caught in the narrow bottlenecks of the foothills.

A certain physical composition accompanied Napoleon's use of surprise. He did not think that such a large force could be moved into a favorable position completely without the notice of the opposing commander. Rather, only a small discrepancy between the opponent's assessment of his location and his true position was necessary to implement a surprise attack. Napoleon, using the speed of his army, often employed a cavalry screen to shield his movements from the enemy. He could then surprise his

⁸ Barnow, *Maxims*, XIV, 15-16.

⁹ Napoleon to Masséna, 9 April 1800, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 4711, VI, 273.

opponent with an attack from the rear.¹⁰ This movement also incorporated stealthy movement. His troops could not announce their movement and final position by making noise. Instead, they had to move quietly and with the usual Napoleonic speed. The Emperor, in fact, ordered Eugène to move against several chateaux in southern Germany with this exact movement in 1805.¹¹ The stealthy and quick movement of the French troops enabled them to gain positions before the enemy gained knowledge of their presence.

Surprise was also acquired by Napoleon through the use of various maneuvers. He did not want the opponent to know of his intentions before battle. Indeed, he often used a campaign of misinformation to mislead his opponent. The opponent would move to stop Napoleon's anticipated maneuver; in so doing, it made the true French attack more of a surprise and more effective.¹² At this point Napoleon's conception of surprise and security overlapped. The use of proper security ensured the possibility of surprise, given the proper actions by the commander. Only a commander of true genius could manipulate his troops in such a manner as to totally deceive the enemy as to his intentions. The former method of deliberate movement to avoid pitched battle was usurped by Napoleon's search for speed, surprise and a decisive result. To this end, the Emperor tried to employ feints and false maneuvers.¹³ These movements, intentionally poor, lured the enemy into a poor position and a false sense of security. The French

¹⁰ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 186.

¹¹ Napoleon to Eugène, 13 September 1805, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 9208, XI, 232.

¹² Colin, *L'Éducation Militaire*, 360.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 365.

could then move to the attack, surprising their enemy and delivering a massive punch in an unexpected area.

Napoleon, understanding the power of surprise, feared such a maneuver on the part of his enemy. Consequently, he took steps to avoid such an occurrence. Much of his positioning on the battlefield, reconnoitered well in advance, dealt with surprise. He wanted his army to have the opportunity to deceive its opponent; on the other hand, he did not want to be surprised. Thus, he tried to place his position far enough from the enemy to leave himself time to mass his troops.¹⁴ If the opposing army arrived unexpectedly, Napoleon could gather his troops in time to offer a firm resistance at the point of attack. Of course, such a mass relied upon Napoleon's ability to discern feints and the true movements of an army. Fortunately for the French, Napoleon was unsurpassed in his ability to anticipate and counter enemy movements. The French Army was rarely surprised. As a former artillery officer, Napoleon certainly saw the value of the guns. He wanted his army to occupy the best position possible. However, if the enemy occupied a dominant artillery position, Napoleon advocated a surprise attack.¹⁵ Such a thrust would minimize the impact of the enemy's artillery since they would be unable to fire if the attack came swiftly or from a different direction than anticipated. Napoleon used this maxim to great effect against his opponents that continued to try to force action on a chosen piece of land, expecting a set piece battle.

¹⁴ Barnow, *Maxims*, XXIV, 21.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

The Emperor did not overlook the importance of surprise to the outcome of a battle. Not only could such a movement provide the decisive thrust in favor of the French, it could also demoralize the opponent. As described previously, an army fearing the direction of the next attack could not fight effectively. Consequently, Napoleon's surprise often drove the enemy into headlong retreat.¹⁶ The opponent could not withstand so strong a forward movement; it could not hope to resist once the soldiers in the line had lost the will to fight. He felt that a surprise against a general in an unfortunate situation had to cause a retreat. In fact, he advised that "an ordinary general occupying a bad position, if surprised ... seeks safety in retreat."¹⁷ Most of Napoleon's opponents throughout his period of military dominance were "ordinary commanders." Thus, Napoleon and his army could easily carry the day simply by forcing an opponent into a bad position and surprising him. Such a maneuver was utilized time and again by Napoleon's forces. For instance, Napoleon enticed the Russians into an extremely poor position at Friedland. He surprised them with a flanking attack, and the Russians died in large numbers trying to retreat across the river. Napoleon used the same principle at the Battle of Marengo, launching a counterattack late in the day to overwhelm the surprised Austrians.

De Gaulle considered surprise an extremely important aspect of warfare. He did not want an army to attempt to function from a position of disadvantage. He echoed Napoleon's sentiments on the inclusion of surprise into every operation. Indeed, De

¹⁶ Colin, *L'Éducation Militaire*, 366.

¹⁷ Barnow, *Maxims*, XVIII, 18.

Gaulle included “surprise for the enemy” among his principles of war.¹⁸ De Gaulle did not delineate exactly many of his principles. However, he considered surprise so overwhelmingly important that he included it along with mass and maneuver. Warfare, by nature, required a victorious army to move, to place itself in a position most favorable. The General thought of surprise as an integral part of war.¹⁹ An army could not operate properly without including surprise as a normal part of doctrine. This surprise could be achieved in a variety of ways, from maneuver to deception. Indeed, De Gaulle inherited the ideas of Napoleon; his conception of their implementation had to parallel the Emperor’s theories.

Much like the principle of offensive, De Gaulle did not want an army trying to enact surprise passively. Indeed, the initiative was extremely important in ensuring surprise. The attitude of the commander and his forces was also critical. De Gaulle wanted his force to act with “fierce unexpectedness.”²⁰ In other words, the rapid application of military power at an unexpected location, at an unanticipated moment, helped greatly in an effort to defeat an enemy. In order to surprise an opponent, the army had to include independent units. Although under the direction of the unified commander, the units had to move independently to exact surprise properly. Such a method of attack could not help but disconcert the enemy. “Being independent in its movements, the ... army will be all the more able to strike unexpectedly.”²¹ These

¹⁸ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 74.

¹⁹ De Gaulle, *Army*, 126.

²⁰ Lacouture, *De Gaulle*, 134.

²¹ De Gaulle, *Army*, 134.

independent units could strike at different points along the enemy line. De Gaulle's commander could coordinate these attacks while also massing a large force at a position unanticipated by his opponent. The General, in this case, utilized Napoleon's emphasis on security and deception. A strong campaign of deception, incorporated with excellent intelligence, could not help but surprise the opponent.

De Gaulle's army, on the other hand, certainly did not advance randomly seeking surprise. This force had to operate under a plan conceived by the commander and his staff. Indeed, the principle of surprise required extensive planning. The commander could capitalize on the surprise only if he determined its exact location and timing. In De Gaulle's words, "Surprise must be organized."²² The commander had to exercise authority and influence over his entire force and to ensure surprise. Much like Napoleon's use of cavalry screens, De Gaulle felt that mobile forces were extremely important for the proper surprise to occur. He wanted to use his mobile forces as both a screen, keeping the enemy from divining his intentions, as well as a component of the surprise. De Gaulle's theory of mechanized movement, for the most part, incorporated tanks as his version of armored cavalry. He felt that the rapidly-developing technology of tanks could return warfare to the methods employed by Napoleon. "Through the tank was reborn the art of surprise."²³ The General noted that Napoleon's employment of surprise was indeed an art form. Such a method could not succeed without a brilliant

²² Ibid., 136.

²³ Ibid., 68. As discussed in the chapters dealing with offensive, mass and maneuver, De Gaulle wanted his forces to move rapidly. He envisioned an offensive force that included both light and heavy tanks. The light tanks could serve much the same purpose as the Napoleonic cavalry, at least in terms of setting a cavalry screen. The heavy tanks provided the bulk of the effort during the actual attack.

commander. Consequently, De Gaulle required a commander with the ability to recognize enemy weak points, utilizing his forces to great effect in attacks.

De Gaulle's entire conception of war was predicated on the existence of surprise. He felt that a fighting force could be effective, forcing the enemy to retreat, only after surprise was utilized properly. His method of warfare, incorporating fast-moving cavalry and infantry reinforcements, allowed for the constant use of surprise attacks.²⁴ Within the European sphere of operations, all of the nations had relatively strong armies by the twentieth century. The continent had just recovered from the massive carnage and brutal methods of the First World War. De Gaulle saw that another protracted, static-front war could not be waged effectively. Such a battle would lead to a prodigious number of casualties on both sides. He saw that Germany was the greatest potential enemy after the rise of fascism. Therefore, the General favored a preventive strike on Germany.²⁵ A preventive war was especially necessary after the constant appeasement tactics of Neville Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier had allowed the revitalized German state to expand into Czechoslovakia and Austria.²⁶

Unfortunately for France, De Gaulle's voice during this period went largely unheard. French officials, as well as the French military, had fallen under the spell of Marshal Pétain and his doctrine of firepower as supreme. De Gaulle fired one last salvo

²⁴ Ibid., 134.

²⁵ Crawley, *De Gaulle*, 73.

²⁶ Interestingly, the Germans considered the months after Munich the most dangerous period of the interwar years. Adolf Hitler and Heinz Guderian both commented, during and after the war, on the relative weakness of the German war machine in this period. The German state could not have withstood a concerted, massed attack on the part of the Allies, especially France and Great Britain.

in his effort to save France, sending the “Memorandum to the Eighty” to select members of the government in 1940. He warned in this document that the next war would demonstrate the extreme importance of surprise.²⁷ The reliance on movement incorporated into his system (as well as the new German method) called for surprise attacks by a quick striking force. The French fell victim to this surprise in the early days of the Battle of France as the Germans punctured and circumvented the impregnable Maginot Line. At this point, De Gaulle saw his first and only action of the war. He attempted to utilize the principles he had laid down, the same ideas inherited from Napoleon. He attacked the Germans at the most unexpected moment because the Germans did not fight aggressively, seeing that his forces were weak and disorganized.²⁸ Although De Gaulle had slowed their advance with a surprise attack, the Germans eventually overwhelmed the weak French units. Nonetheless, the General had learned Napoleon’s lessons well; unfortunately for France, the Emperor’s wisdom was largely ignored by other French military leaders.

The campaigns of Napoleon, and even the brief command of De Gaulle on the western front, demonstrate clearly the value of surprise in warfare. A military force placed at a disadvantage by a surprise attack could rarely recover. This surprise could come in a variety of forms. Napoleon envisioned a surprise through rapidity of movement, maneuver, deception or a combination of all these options. De Gaulle understood this principle as developed by Napoleon and applied it in his theories. France should have benefited greatly from the theories of both men. Napoleon utilized surprise

²⁷ Schoenbrun, *The Three Lives of Charles De Gaulle*, 61.

²⁸ Ibid., 65. De Gaulle’s forces actually drove into German-held territory, only to be hurled

to a large extent; consequently, the French Army enjoyed unprecedented success.

Twentieth-century France, on the other hand, refused to heed De Gaulle's suggestions for an offensive war. The French paid the price for timidity, as the Germans employed De Gaulle's theories. In the end, Napoleon's emphasis on surprise continued to influence the course of war up to and including the twentieth century. The disregard for this principle was a direct cause of the bloody conflicts of the twentieth century.

CHAPTER 10

SIMPLICITY

Society, especially the military, follows general trends. A span of one hundred years can see remarkable changes in the makeup of a society. Indeed, military theory, and the ideas that are en vogue, seems to change with the wind. Complexity is a prime example of a societal trend that seeped into military affairs. Napoleon, during his time as the first soldier of Europe, fought this trend. He argued that simplicity was a virtue in war. The simplest operations helped to make a nation's war effort successful. He wanted war to be prosecuted in a "realistic, decisive fashion."¹ In other words, he wanted to dispense with much of the preliminaries that often accompanied the planning and execution of operations. After his fall, military commanders became convinced that more complex operations were the key to victory. Many of these theorists forgot the Napoleonic principles of war. Charles De Gaulle, however, asserted the value of these principles in the 1930s. He recognized the value of simplicity in warfare. He saw that the army had a "taste for what is precise, finished and carefully worked out."² Basically, the process of planning and execution could not include a jumble of disparate goals and actions.

¹ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 145.

² De Gaulle, *Army*, 62.

Instead, a simple procedure would often suffice in place of a complex activity.

Simplicity was the key in keeping military operations in control.

Napoleon included the importance of the commander in his assessment of simplicity. Operations could not succeed with simplicity, without the presence of a brilliant leader. The Emperor felt that this general should be “capable of exhibiting with simplicity the most complicated movements of an army.”³ In essence, a great general must be able to reduce even the most complicated maneuver to its bare essentials. He needed to be able to perform a complex operation in a simpler manner. De Gaulle hoped for the same thing in his idealized portrait of a military force. However, the period during which he wrote was marked by the complexity of the First World War and the concentration of intricate fortifications. He wanted to move away from the huge, complex operations that had become a part of war. “The principle of quality, as opposed to that of quantity, is ... gaining ground.”⁴ In short, De Gaulle wanted the leader to focus on a qualitative method of war. The quantity of different attacks was not important; rather, the result was paramount. Simplicity should govern all military operations.

Napoleon allowed the principle of simplicity to govern his life, both military and personal. He felt so strongly about the need for simplicity that he incorporated it into his writing. Indeed, Napoleon believed and wrote in “primitive simplicity.”⁵ He did not believe in the need for too much expression, just as he saw no purpose for an excess of complexity on the battlefield. Napoleon wanted nothing but the bare essentials in his

³ Barnow, *Maxims*, LXXIV, 64.

⁴ De Gaulle, *Army*, 63.

⁵ Colin, *L'Éducation Militaire*, 367.

military movements. As mentioned previously, Napoleon loved maneuver; he reveled in its “beautiful simplicity.”⁶ Napoleon could not envision a simpler, better way to win a battle. Maneuver was both the cleanest and easiest method to earn such a victory. A commander that kept his operations simple, perhaps using a great strategic maneuver, greatly increased his chances for success.

Napoleon’s definition of the nature of war itself was an example of simplicity. Napoleon did not see war as an organic entity, possible of resisting attempts to make it easier. Rather, he felt that war was quite simple. The conflict between armies was made up of a series of accidents and chance; a great commander used the simple principles of war to find victory.⁷ A general could emerge victorious from such a struggle only if he did not overanalyze the situation. Instead, he needed only to remember the principles, applying his genius at the proper moment. Such a campaign was inherently simple, since no complex movement or troop combination was required. Napoleon, for the sake of simplicity, tried to keep his force as compact and well controlled as possible. He considered his force a “single entity” operating along a “single axis of operations.”⁸ This simply constructed force, acting along only one line, was much easier to control. The use of a force in a very complex maneuver, splitting it into many parts over a great distance with a variety of different commanders, could only hurt the overall effectiveness, as the Russian campaign clearly demonstrated. Instead, Napoleon wanted an army to move, for the most part, in a straight line, with a specific goal. The commander, a man of genius,

⁶ Chandler, *Campaigns*, 150.

⁷ Gagneur, *Napoléon*, 254.

⁸ Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 87.

was the only person who could change the line, and it was only by product of his ability that his movement could occur. "The line of operations should not be abandoned, but it is one of the most skillful maneuvers in war to know how to change it."⁹ Even a brilliant commander could not attempt such radical, complicated movements with frequency. Only in extreme circumstances should such complexity be added to warfare. Napoleon wanted simple plans that resulted from simple planning. He did not want too many men working together; the end result could only be failure. In addition, Napoleon feared the complexity added the night before an anticipated battle. He advised that plans not be changed immediately prior to an engagement.¹⁰ This type of change could only cause confusion in the ranks and lead to ignorance among at least some of the leaders. Such a change could only lead to timidity on the part of the army, as the soldiers did not know what to expect. The knowledge, in advance, of the style, location and time of fighting could help immensely to ease the tension that accompanied the ordinary foot soldier.

Napoleon's ideas on simplicity also extended to the basic makeup of his fighting force. Complicated maneuvers could be made even worse by complicated formations. During his gradual reform of the organization of the *Grande Armée*, the First Consul, and later Emperor, eventually removed cavalry from the smallest units of infantry. He felt that "the practice of mixing small bodies of infantry and cavalry together is a bad one."¹¹ Some of his predecessors, including Broglie and Saxe, had attempted such combinations.

⁹ Chandler, *Maxims*, XX, 62.

¹⁰ Ibid., XXVIII, 64.

¹¹ Ibid., XLIX, 72. Napoleon, during these reforms, centralized most of the cavalry in a large reserve, basically an independent corps of cavalry, under the command of Marshal Joachim Murat. However, he did include a brigade of cavalry with each of the *corps d'armée*, as well as a corps of cavalry with small armies, like the Army of Portugal.

They reported that these units were confused and often in conflict. Small units of horse and men simply did not function effectively together. However, Napoleon did not reject the idea of combined arms, as did those theorists. Instead, the smallest unit of infantry with an attached unit of cavalry was the corps. He valued the simplicity of a unit comprised only of infantry, or exclusively cavalry, that could perform its desired function.

Napoleon's infantry was, of course, very important to the outcome of the battle. A great debate had raged in the period immediately before Napoleon's rise to power, a conflict solved by Guibert's advocacy of the *ordre mixte*. In essence, this system allowed for a force to march in column, deploying into line if necessary for battle. This system greatly simplified movements entering the battlefield, and even during the course of the struggle.¹² The movement of troops became simpler and easier, and Napoleon did not have to worry about one complexity of the old form of warfare. The deployment of men into firing positions was easy, as opposed to the immense complexity of Frederick the Great's oblique movements. Napoleon had implemented the simplest, and consequently most effective, method of applying firepower to the opposing force. The French armies rode the wave of this radical simplicity across Europe, dominating the continent like no army had ever done before.

Napoleon expected the same emphasis on simplicity from his commanders. In turn, as mentioned in the section regarding objective, Napoleon never pushed

¹² Nosworthy, *With Musket*, 87.

complicated plans on his subordinates. Instead, he gave them simple instructions.¹³ If necessary, Napoleon expected his commanders to extrapolate upon their basic orders, always keeping in mind that simplicity was a must. Napoleon's letters to Joseph in Naples are a fine example of his tendency to keep plans and instructions simple. Napoleon wanted Joseph to maintain a single line of operations, knowing that his brother certainly did not possess military genius. He ordered his brother to move only along this line, keeping his movement and troop combination simple, culminating in a large battle with Joseph's force deployed *en masse*.¹⁴ Napoleon did not attempt to give a detailed plan to his older brother. Instead, he only advised that Joseph gain his objective by maintaining simplicity in his campaign, keeping a clear focus.

Napoleon certainly did not doubt the consequences if he failed to keep his operations simple. He knew that an overly complicated system, or a complex plan of maneuver, could only hurt the efficacy and efficiency of his force. Thus, he tried to keep everything simple. The Emperor believed that an army, most especially cavalry, placed in a complex formation or maneuver "loses its impulse."¹⁵ The members of these forces would concentrate only on the difficult march or the close quarters. They would lose focus on the ultimate goal, the enemy. Thus, they would cease to fight as effectively, moving lackadaisically.

Late in his career, Napoleon violated his own principles repeatedly. The reasons behind this apparent loss in concentration are truly unknown, and in any case such an

¹³ See Napoleon to Gouvion St. Cyr, 2 September 1805, *Correspondance de Napoléon Ier*, No. 9176, XI, 211, for an excellent example of this trend.

¹⁴ Napoleon to Joseph, 19 January 1806, *Ibid.*, No. 9685, XI, 665.

¹⁵ Barnow, *Maxims*, XLIX, 42.

analysis has no place here. The Russian campaign stood as the most disastrous single campaign of the Napoleonic era. It cost almost as many lives as the Peninsular War, a series of campaigns that lasted six times as long. Not only did Napoleon lose his unity of command in this area, he also lost the idea of simplicity. He had many men, spread over a large area, commanded by a variety of commanders. The size of the theater truly hurt the Emperor.¹⁶ He could not hope to keep his operation simple with so daunting a task as the Russian countryside sprawling in front of him. The operation, in truth, was doomed to failure before it began. At the same time, with an army composed primarily of non-French troops, Napoleon sought the simplest operations. At Borodino, all the principles of war that could have been employed were reduced to a simple frontal assault because of the consumption of the troops.

The 1813 campaign, on the other hand, was executed brilliantly. In the end, however, Napoleon's opponents were simply too strong. The Emperor made many of the same mistakes he made only a year earlier in Russia. He employed far too large a force to keep his operations simple. In addition, he repeatedly changed his line of operations, dangerous even for the greatest military mind of the last thousand years.¹⁷ Despite Napoleon's immense military acumen and reasonably well-trained subordinate commanders, the French Army simply could not overcome the simplicity of the Allied plans. They made no maneuvers, beyond retreat; instead, they drew Napoleon's subordinates into the trap, and he became a victim of his own principles of war. Indeed, the Allies succeeded in part because they forced Napoleon to complicate his operations

¹⁶ Dodge, *Napoleon*, III, 489.

with an army composed of many foreign units. They separated his unified command, causing him to undertake an immensely difficult campaign with several different marshals commanding independent operations.¹⁸ The immensity of the task overwhelmed the French. They had lost sight of Napoleon's principles of war, especially simplicity. Although Napoleon's ideas were brilliant in conception, he could not account for the small occurrences that often shaped the course of a battle. It was for this reason that Napoleon had originally sought simplicity; in the end, he demonstrated the need for simplicity through his own failure.

De Gaulle certainly learned from Napoleon's failures and his successes; of course, he was above all an advocate of the Napoleonic principles of war. De Gaulle wanted the French to wage war in much the same way that Napoleon had advanced the First Empire's troops in the nineteenth century. The General admired the "august simplicity" of Napoleon's campaigns.¹⁹ He felt that the Napoleonic method was great simply because it was not grandiose. Napoleon did not require much in his campaigns; he was straightforward in his dominance of Europe. De Gaulle especially admired Napoleon's reliance on the circumstances and flexibility. This aspect of the Emperor's theory was perhaps most important; simplicity came from allowing events to develop. De Gaulle believed: "The whole of Napoleon's method in the field was firmly based on three essentials: to grasp the situation, to adapt himself to it and to exploit it to his own

¹⁷ Piérion, *Étude Stratégique*, 35.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Conférences d'histoire à Saint-Cyr, 1921, De Gaulle, *Lettres*, 117.

advantage.”²⁰ The “august simplicity” of which De Gaulle spoke so glowingly was clearly present in Napoleon’s method of campaign. He did not try to overanalyze the situation, applying a series of complex maneuvers. Instead, success was found in the simple application of the principles of war, administered by a military genius aware of the circumstances.

Much like Napoleon, De Gaulle considered planning in his consideration of simplicity. Complicated plans could be easily misinterpreted, and chance events played a greater role in an intricate operation. Thus, he felt that objectives should “be limited by the means we have to achieve them.”²¹ Basically, De Gaulle wanted plans to be narrowly tailored to the desired results. A complicated plan to take a simple hill with only a small unit of French soldiers was inconceivable. The means and conditions surrounding the event were critical in determining the proper procedure. A simple plan executed immediately would be far more effective than a complicated plan later. To this end, De Gaulle envisioned a small, modernized force.²² This force, consisting of soldiers specialized in certain fields, could be wielded much more simply. De Gaulle saw the mistakes made by previous commanders, from Napoleon to the German General Staff in World War I. He learned from their experiences, incorporating their lessons to his theory. A smaller, more mobile force could achieve objectives in a simpler manner than could a large, sluggish army.

²⁰ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 78.

²¹ De Gaulle, *Army*, 133.

²² Barrès, *De Gaulle*, 32.

De Gaulle considered the same small problems that beset Napoleon in some of his massive undertakings. He saw that larger operations were more susceptible to mistakes, as more opportunities arose. Thus, the General wanted simple plans that helped to eliminate the intricate, detailed problems that attended a huge campaign.²³ The army could not function if it was constantly embroiled in the small problems arising from the complexity of planning. These complications, however, were very difficult to discern. At times, Napoleon, despite his genius, could not conquer all the difficulties of a complex campaign. In any case, a true genius was required to overcome any obstacle to simplicity.²⁴ The best-laid plans could be destroyed by an event that had not been considered. Thus, war had to be kept simple, beyond the reach of chance and minutiae.

These complications, in De Gaulle's opinion, could come from many sides. De Gaulle's background in the early twentieth century, observing the political infighting of both the Third Republic and the French Army, gave him unique perspective. He knew that simplicity was necessary; he also concluded that such simplicity was impossible with massive government involvement. Consequently, he advised that government be kept away from military planning.²⁵ The government, especially the Third Republic, could only stand in the way of proper planning. The addition of political concerns to military

²³ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 16.

²⁴ De Gaulle, *Army*, 70.

²⁵ Letter to Lucien Nachin, Jan 1926, in Crozier, *De Gaulle*, 45. De Gaulle's insistence on this point, the separation of political and military concerns, is very interesting. After his return to power in 1958, he created the Fifth Republic, dominated by the executive. From this lofty post he decided military policy. Apparently, he had abandoned his policy of total separation of military and civil authority by the time he took office. De Gaulle must have been envious of Napoleon's political and military situation. As both political and military leader of France, his decisions were immediate and applicable to both areas simultaneously.

objectives complicated the matter so completely that no true action was possible. The military became almost impotent, mired in complexity.

In addition, De Gaulle saw the problems of the increasing technology of the modern world. Such technology could only lead to an increase in military complexity.²⁶ The only response to this increase in complexity was to reduce it by specialization. The army had to have people responsible for every piece of technology. In so doing, the military force maintained simplicity, as it could not function without this principle of war. The commander, of course, had to play a huge role in the reduction of this complexity as well. He had to understand the subtleties of the new war so that he could adequately deploy his forces.²⁷ In other words, simplicity had to exist not only on the battlefield in execution, but also in the minds of the leader and his staff. The plans could be simple only if the planners fully understood every aspect of their force.

A variety of reasons existed to support De Gaulle's assertion of the importance of simplicity. First, he discussed the consequences of a lack of simplicity. A commander that failed to maintain this principle was doomed to failure. Indeed, De Gaulle felt that a simple plan could stop the order of the attack from being broken.²⁸ In essence, the soldiers of a simple movement would be more confident, not afraid of a misstep or trying to remember correct placement. A complicated maneuver only begged the opposing commander to strike at its weakest point, ending the forward advance and possibly beginning a rout by the enemy. Obviously, De Gaulle wanted victory, not an

²⁶ De Gaulle, *Army*, 53-4.

²⁷ Ibid., 60.

²⁸ Ibid., 146.

indeterminate draw or perhaps even a loss. The commanders could fall into much the same trap as the common soldier in such a plan. A leader that forgot to apply simplicity risked falling into an operation in which, “the smallest details are mapped out, to realize the consequences that may result from some unforeseen hitch.”²⁹ Ironically, the small details for which the complicated planner attempted to account were indeterminate. In other words, the leader was attempting to plan for an event that could not be predicted. Instead, the complexity added by the measures adopted to combat the “unforeseen hitch” caused further problems, as increased complexity led to an increased incidence of unfortunate events on the battlefield.

At the same time, De Gaulle recognized that limits to simplicity existed. He feared that some commanders could misinterpret the principles of war, going too far in attempting to avoid overplanning. “It is true that military men ... will sometimes neglect to make use of it [intelligence] at all.”³⁰ This misuse, or disuse, of intelligence was in direct violation of another principle of war, security. A leader that tried to move his troops on instinct or whim was also destined for failure. He had to keep the basic principles of war in mind throughout his campaign. The greatest example of this trend, in De Gaulle’s mind, was the doctrine of Pétain and his followers in the interwar period. They tried to anticipate the course of an operation simply by the nature of the terrain. Such an attempt was basically foolhardy, and open to problems.³¹ Basic military doctrine still required flexibility. The commander had to have an influence; military force could not be applied to its fullest potential without a brilliant commander. Pétain’s doctrine

²⁹ Ibid., 131.

³⁰ De Gaulle, *Sword*, 24.

attempted to remove responsibility from the commander's hands, reducing military theory to such a simple idea that no interpretation was necessary. This idea was, in De Gaulle's opinion, ridiculous and bound to fail.

De Gaulle, of course, was right. The principles of war had to be applied in all military situations. A prescriptive approach did not, and still does not, exist to military theory. The weight of military operations fell on the shoulders of the commander, as he had to judge the proper moment for a variety of actions. On the other hand, he could not allow himself to be tied down in complexity. Operations had to remain simple at the peril of massive military defeat. Several of Napoleon's great victories were won with simple maneuver or speed. He did not attempt to overanalyze the campaign and the terrain. Instead, he analyzed the situation and adapted it to existing circumstances. De Gaulle inherited this principle of war, and applied it to his own theory. Military operations must remain simple in order to be successful, and a brilliant commander must guide them. De Gaulle and Napoleon always had simple operations in mind; in the end, they led France to the greatest heights of its history.

³¹ Ibid., 87.

CONCLUSION

Military theory, in the period immediately preceding Napoleon, saw a massive proliferation in the amount of material published. The sudden interest in the quantification of military art into a science probably sprang from the dual influences of the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment. The theorists that wrote during this period contributed immensely to the education of young Napoleon Bonaparte. He took their lessons, especially those espoused by Guibert and Bourcet, to heart. In reality, Napoleon was not a great theorist. He did not write extensive tracts on the proper method for waging war. Rather, he attempted to perfect the methods already in existence. He consulted the works of the great eighteenth century theorists, at least in spirit, and took the essence of each man's ideas. In so doing, Napoleon integrated the diverse theories of all these men, making them into one coherent whole. He perfected his theory and way of war on the battlefield, ensuring that the principles he identified were effective.

The art of war, in the age of Napoleon, advanced drastically. The methods that he practiced on the battlefield were far advanced from those of his enemies. Most of his opponents still utilized the rigid, formalistic theories of Frederick the Great and other theorists of the eighteenth century. He imbued the French armies first with a speed that had never before been a part of warfare on the European continent. The other European generals were stunned by the rapidity of the French marches across Europe. In addition,

the Napoleonic system of war proved far more flexible than former systems. Indeed, Napoleon's ideas on war were far from absolute. He felt that "no rule of war is so absolute as to allow no exceptions."¹ It was this flexible application of the principles of war that allowed the French Army to enjoy such great success. Moreover, a great commander, Napoleon, led the French. The necessity for a great commander underlined the principles of war; without such a leader, Napoleon's theories were moot. It should also be noted that a great commander had to have great subordinates and Napoleon was served by a galore of generals the likes of which had never before been seen in European history.

Napoleon, in the end, did provide the basis for the modern principles of war. He indicated, by his writings and actions, that some principles had to be followed in all war-time situations. The principles of war can be seen in almost all of Napoleon's campaigns, from his first operations in Italy in 1794 through each subsequent war. There were lapses at Eylau in 1807, at Aspern-Essling in 1809, at Borodino in 1812 and in the Saxon Campaign of 1813, but these were isolated incidents until 1813 when his resources and manpower were vastly inferior to that of his opponents. Napoleon realized that the principles were not always applicable, especially when his opponents had an enormous numerical advantage. Nevertheless, Napoleon's setbacks most often occurred when he did not follow his own principles of war.

Napoleon did not seek to prescribe the perfect approach to war. He did not provide his predecessors with a book detailing the art of war. Instead, he placed a great deal of emphasis on the individual skill of the commander. The application of the

¹ Barnow, *Maxims*, 38.

principles was entirely up to this leader. The principles, after all, had to work together. Only the perfect combination would succeed.

The importance of Napoleon's principles was clearly in evidence in the actions of his opponents. Early in his career, at battles like Castiglione and Rivoli, the coalition nations had not yet deciphered the Napoleonic principles. Consequently, the French forces achieved unheard of successes. The pinnacle of Napoleonic power over his adversaries was reached in the campaigns of 1805-07. The battles of Ulm, Austerlitz, Jena-Auerstadt and Friedland stand as his greatest. Unfortunately for the French, it was at this point that the coalition began to comprehend his principles. French losses at Aspern-Essling and in the Peninsula, to name a few, were the results of either French disregard for Napoleonic principles or the proper application of these same principles by the opponent. By the time of the campaigns of 1813, 1814 and even the Hundred Days of 1815, the British, Austrian and Prussian forces understood the Napoleonic method of war. Nevertheless, it is questionable that they could employ his system of war against him, as demonstrated by the repeated French victories in 1814 and 1815. In the end, the Allies lacked the key ingredient of the Napoleonic system -- a great military leader.

Napoleonic theory did not end with his defeat in 1815. Rather, it continued to be applied by armies across Europe. French generals, from the Franco-Prussian War to the First World War tried to interpret Napoleon correctly. After a brief decline in popularity, Charles De Gaulle emerged as one of the foremost proponents of a revitalization of Napoleon's method of warfare. The General himself was hardly an innovator; rather, he adopted the ideas of Napoleon for use in the French Army of the twentieth century. He added modern technology in place of the old French siege guns and horse cavalry; in the

end, the ideas were identical. In essence, De Gaulle restated the Napoleonic concepts in more modern terms. Napoleon's principles of war were as important to the Gallist method of war as they were in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. De Gaulle pointed to Napoleon during his lectures at the École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr, speaking often of the Emperor's "eternal principles" of war. He admired Napoleon's utilization of these principles, noting that the skill of the commander played perhaps the greatest role in the outcome of battle.

Napoleon, to this day, stands as the greatest military leader of the last one thousand years. His ability to move troops and supplies was unsurpassed, and he excelled at the motivation and utilization of his army. He performed a great service for European military theorists, recording many of his ideas on war in his voluminous *Correspondance* or his writings during exile at St. Helena. The codification of these ideas into the modern principles of war advanced the military art considerably. General Charles De Gaulle advocated these same principles in the 1930s and 1940s. His voice went unheard in the darkness of interwar France. However, a continued application of the Napoleonic principles would have aided the French effort immensely at the beginning of the Second World War. The basis of the military theories of both men, however, was always the importance of a great military leader. Principles could not help an army led by a mediocre commander. Nevertheless, the importance of Napoleon as a military theorist is apparent from the continued use of his principles. He outlined the proper method, within boundaries, of prosecuting a war. He did not try to give a definitive answer; instead, he left an unparalleled history of success and genius as an example for the edification of others. Both Napoleon and De Gaulle sought glory and grandeur for

France. They both achieved their goal, although through different means. Napoleon established French hegemony in Europe, insuring the survival of the ideals of the French Revolution for posterity. De Gaulle, on the other hand, used the political sphere as the primary vehicle to acquiring glory and security for France. In the final analysis, Napoleon's ideas contributed mightily to French history, be it the First Empire or the Fifth Republic.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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